All Nations Issue

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

etective Stories
om the Four Corners
the World

Cents *August, 1948*

eath They Were Divided	F. TENNYSON JESSE
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g a Murderer Myself	ARTHUR WILLIAMS
Garden of Forking Paths	JORGE LUIS BORGES
r in Khaki	EDGAR D. SMITH

ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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MYSTERY WRITERS OF AMERICA INC.

April 21, 1948.

Mr. Lawrence E. Spivak,
Publisher,
Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine,
570 Lexington Avenue,
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Spivak:

I am happy to inform you that as a result of nation-wide balloting by some two hundred members of Mystery Writers of America, Inc., members of your staff have won two of the six Edgar Allan Poe Awards for distinguished achievement in the mystery field during 1947. The winners:

HOWARD HAYCRAFT, named best mystery critic of the year for his "Speaking of Crime" reviews in EQMM.

ELLERY QUEEN, for the year's outstanding contribution to the mystery short story, as editor of EQMM and of numerous anthologies.

The "Edgars" are being presented at MWA's annual Edgar Allan Poe Awards Dinner tonight, which, as you know, marks the birthday of the detective story -- the 107th anniversary of the original publication of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

Congratulations!

Sincerely

Lawrence G. Blochman

Lawrence G. Blochman,
President, MWA.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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by SHELLEY SMITH

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"Suspense and excellent character drawing . . . a thrilling climax." The New York Times

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Invites you to enter its Fourth

$6,000 SHORT STORY CONTEST

($1,000 of the $6,000 will be contributed by Little, Brown & Co., publishers, of Boston)

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8 ADDITIONAL PRIZES

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Conditions of the Contest

1. Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine offers a cash award of $2,000 as First Prize for the best original detective or crime short story. In addition, *EQMM* will award a Second Prize of $1,000, four (4) Third Prizes of $500 each, and four (4) Fourth Prizes of $250 each. All prizes include publication rights in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, subject to the provisions of paragraph 7. Other acceptable stories will be purchased at *EQMM*'s regular rates.

2. Preferably, stories should not exceed 10,000 words.

3. Awards will be made solely on the basis of merit — that is, quality of writing and originality of plot. The contest is open to everyone except employees of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, The American Mercury, Inc., and their families. Stories are solicited from amateur as well as professional writers; from beginners as well as old-timers. All will have an equal chance to win the prizes.

4. The judges who will make the final decision in the contest will be Ellery Queen and the editorial staff of Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

5. All entries must be received at the office of the magazine, 570 Lexington Avenue, New York 22, N. Y., not later than October 20, 1948.

6. Prize winners will be announced and the prizes awarded by Christmas 1948. The prize-winning stories will appear in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine during 1949.

7. All prize winners and all other contestants whose stories are purchased agree to grant Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine first book-anthology rights, and when these rights are exercised, they will be paid for as follows: $50 for the original edition, $25 for cheap editions, and a pro rata share of 25% of the royalties if the anthology should be chosen by a book club. Authors of all stories bought through this contest agree to sell non-exclusive foreign rights for $35 per story.

8. Every care will be taken to return unsuitable manuscripts, but Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine cannot accept responsibility for them. Manuscripts should be typed or legibly written, accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope, and mailed by first-class mail to:

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BEHOLD HOW GOOD AND HOW PLEASANT IT IS FOR BRETHREN TO DWELL TOGETHER IN UNITY

The outstanding development of last year's Prize Contest was the unexpectedly large number of stories sent in from foreign countries and their remarkable range of geographical representation. Manuscripts were submitted from Canada, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Brazil, Argentina, China, Japan, the Philippines, Australia, Union of South Africa, Algeria, Southern Rhodesia, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal. This united effort on the part of detective-story writers proved that while we still have a long way to go politically, the planet Earth is truly One World detective-storywise. Detective-story writers can work together in a common cause; while others are still fighting for life and liberty in some parts of the world, detective-story writers are demonstrating the essential oneness of the world by striving, all for one, one for all, to recapture the most peaceful of peacetime pursuits — the pursuit of happiness. This is a step in the right direction — toward international harmony and cooperation, toward good will on earth. (May the bickering, bargaining statesmen of the world heed the example set by detective-story writers!)

To celebrate this United Nations effort on the part of detective-story writers, we have devoted this entire issue to the international scope of the detective short story, past and present. You will find all six continents represented, with prize-winning stories from Australia, Argentina, South Africa, Portugal, and the Philippines, and other stories from the United States, England, Canada, France, Belgium, Italy, Hungary, Russia, and Czechoslovakia.

We lead off our United Nations exposition with eight stories from Europe. The first is the standard bearer from England — an unknown story by F. Tennyson Jesse who is probably best known among aficionados as the author of THE SOLANGE STORIES *in which Miss Jesse created Solange Fontaine, a distaff detective "gifted by nature with an extra spiritual sense that warned her of evil."*

You may recall that in our definitive anthology of the detective short story, 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT*–(first published by Little, Brown in 1941 and now available as a Modern Library Giant), we included a section called* THE GREAT CRIME STORIES. *Among the ten tales in this section is F. Tennyson Jesse's "Treasure Trove," of which we wrote: "A deli-*

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cately-wrought and mystically-conceived story which conceals its astounding point, à la O. Henry, until the very last paragraph."

Since that exciting time when we made the final selections for 101 YEARS' ENTERTAINMENT, *we have discovered F. Tennyson Jesse's "In Death They Were Divided." In our opinion this is an even finer piece of sheer writing craftsmanship than "Treasure Trove," and had we known of "In Death They Were Divided" before 1941, we would most certainly have substituted it for our original choice. For surely the F. Tennyson Jesse story we now bring to you is even more delicately wrought, even more mystically conceived, and it too conceals its astounding point until the very last paragraphs.*

It is almost unbelievable that "In Death They Were Divided" has never before been published in the United States. This story, to quote the author herself, "shocked both England and America to their back teeth," and perhaps that was the reason Miss Jesse was never able to place the story with any magazine. The story will shock you too — but we hope part of that shock will come from the realization, the positive knowledge, that you have read a masterpiece.

Miss Jesse could never have foreseen that "In Death They Were Divided" would open a United Nations gathering of the detective story. It is, therefore, somewhat by accident that her story should reveal such perfect, such appropriate symbolism. The very title is a message to the world: In war they were divided, in peace they were united — for no one will deny that war is just another word for death. And the story itself can be interpreted as an object lesson to the world: for in this story of two people we see, as clearly as it can ever be proved in words, the crucial need for brotherly and sisterly love.

IN DEATH THEY WERE DIVIDED

by F. TENNYSON JESSE

DOROTHY lay awake, listening to the quiet breathing of her sister Maybelle, and to the gentle equally rhythmic sound, that came at slightly longer intervals, of the distant sea upon the beach. It was a moonlit night, a limpid interval of quiet between the long noisy racket of the Coney Island days, which lasted from the morning of one day till the small hours of the next. Not much time to sleep, for all over the frame house the professionals had to get themselves to bed, and early after dawn the business of the boarding house would begin — the cleaning, the jerking around of fur-

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niture, the noises of heels along wooden passages. Dorothy's back ached, and she moved as gently as she could, to give ease to her own frame without disturbing the sleep of her sister, as she had learned to do during the twenty odd years she and Maybelle had toured the world. Luckily Maybelle had always been a sound sleeper, though Dorothy suffered from insomnia, and the short watches of their rest had always been largely taken up for her by the only conscious thoughts for which she had time. Now as she lay she could hear through the matchboard partition the gentle snoring of her mother, who always fell asleep like a stunned animal.

Poor old mother . . . Dorothy, in spite of the egoism inseparable from a lifelong job as show-girl, often pondered over her mother's life of which she really knew so little. Practical details took up so much of Mrs. Hoffman's time, being manager, wardrobe mistress, and general buffer for her previous girls, that what people of leisure are wont to talk of as "the things that matter" had been taken very much for granted. That is to say, business, religion, states of mind or of the soul had always been subordinated first to the necessity of earning a living, and secondly to the fatigue engendered by that earning. It was really only in the last two years that the Hoffman Girls had been assured that they could now "sit pretty" till that inevitable moment when such mundane matters would cease to be of importance. After all, reflected Dorothy as she stared at the faint ripples of moonlight on the ceiling, death was the only thing you could be sure of. It was not a highly original reflection, but for her it had always had an especial horror. It was the only thing — not so much death, as the manner of it — that had ever worried Maybelle. Not that she ever spoke of it, but Dorothy knew that it was so. Each sister's nightmare was that her sister should die first. But the only thing Mom had ever worried about was what would happen to her girls when she was "gone." And now, apart from the assured position they had made for themselves — for after all there were no dangers implicit in their act as in that of trapeze artists — there was the security represented by Axel.

Axel . . . it was perhaps the thought of him that was keeping Dorothy awake even longer than usual on this hot June night. Axel was in love with Maybelle. He said so, and Dorothy saw no reason to doubt it. Never, in spite of the resemblance between the sisters, had he wavered. And Maybelle was, by just the amount that mattered, the prettier, the more vivid, the more masterful. She had always led, Dorothy always followed. Dorothy's eyes were a soft natural gray, Maybelle's a vivid blue. Dorothy had to have her hair waved to achieve the same effect as that which nature had bestowed on Maybelle. In a "sister act" it was important to look as alike as possible, and the skillful use of make-up and dresses that matched had enabled the Hoff-

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man Girls to present an identical appearance. Only Dorothy, who, like the philosopher Descartes, was conscious of the processes of thought, knew how different were their minds, with a difference so acute that it sometimes seemed to her to be stronger than any physical relationship.

I am I . . . I am not Maybelle . . . I am Dorothy Hoffman. I am myself. I am the only person who is this particular myself in the whole world. Nobody knows it except me, nobody worries about it. I know it. Thus had Dorothy's thoughts always run, though she kept them to herself. Now Axel, the great fair Northerner, the man who could lift incredible weights with his teeth, while his exquisitely controlled muscles hardly swelled with the strain, also knew that there was a difference. At least he knew that Maybelle was Maybelle, but that was not the same thing as knowing that Dorothy was Dorothy, could never be any other human being on the face of this earth.

Yet Dorothy was not jealous of her sister's love being given in a different quality and quantity to another human being, nor did she envy, even unknown to herself, her sister's capture of this man whom beautifully dressed women — "society women" — had wanted. Axel was no boaster, but everyone knew of his fan mail, of the "society women" who had wanted to meet him. And here he was wanting to marry Maybelle, engaged to her. And it wasn't that he thought the publicity would be good for him, though naturally he had no aversion to publicity. He had, indeed, already rehearsed an act in which he swung a garden seat from his teeth, Dorothy and Maybelle upon it, their arms lovingly about each other and their smiling faces leaning cheek to cheek. But Dorothy knew that sort of thing was merely an incidental advantage to the handsome Swede. Perhaps it was true, what she had often heard, and had also observed for herself in the strange places of the world and among its varying breeds, whither her profession had taken her, that the dark tides of Northern blood set more strongly and more curiously than the facile currents of the South. He wanted Maybelle, he had for her this thing labeled love which caused people to be excited about some other human being's personality, which urged them on to know the secrets of that particular mind and body. Axel would marry Maybelle . . . and Dorothy felt that her own last fastnesses, that secret personage of which she alone had always been aware, would be violated, though her body remained untouched. For their bodies were so alike, hers and Maybelle's, that who knew one knew both, and Axel in knowing Maybelle's would know hers. And he might think carelessly, once he and Maybelle were married, that Dorothy's mind was the same as Maybelle's. So many ignorant and hasty people assumed this, but just because Dorothy was entirely different, so entirely herself,

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she felt that this previous, this vital difference, this sense of self was being attacked.

Oh God, cried Dorothy from the secret places of her soul, what are You but a big Barnum anyway? Showman . . . Showman . . . Showman . . . Maybelle likes it, it's never worried her as it has me. Axel . . . he more than likes it, or he wouldn't want to marry Maybelle. But I, Dorothy Hoffman, must set my teeth and bear it as I've borne all the rest, the endless accommodations and disagreeables, the humiliations and outrages of my secret self.

The moonlight faded and she slept a little as a brief darkness filled the room, then the dawn's invasion burned, first softly, then insistently, through her closed lids, making them bright against her unwilling brain, as the window-panes against the shadowy room. She opened her eyes and stared at the ceiling once more. She had been dreaming, and so she had been happy. Just as no short-sighted person is ever short-sighted in his dreams, and no deaf person deaf, so Dorothy was not one of the Hoffman Girls in her dreams, but wandered exquisitely alone through bright pastures caught and held from actual glimpses of green fields and dark trees and sun-filled skies that she had known on rare holidays.

The ugly boarding-house room closed about her. She saw again upon the ceiling, instead of the moonlit ripples of the night, the sooty footprints left by a pair of acrobats, who, annoyed by what they considered an overcharge on the part of the landlady, had blackened their feet and walked about the room on their hands, marking the whitewashed ceiling as though they had walked thereon in some fantastic violation of the laws of nature. The landlady had never had the marks obliterated, because she found the marks amused people and made a good story. Dorothy alone of all the procession of inmates had hated those unnatural and impossible footprints. She stared at them now, her aversion ceasing to trouble her in the face of her own problem.

Maybelle and Axel . . . back the thought came with the new day. And waiting for the slower, less bird-like awakening which was Maybelle's, she felt that the threatened dragging of herself into the emotions of others, which had grown in terror behind the trained smile with which she greeted Maybelle's "beau," must not take place.

Coney Island day . . . Axel's turn at stated intervals, the snake-charmer's turn at stated intervals, the Hoffman Girls' turn at stated intervals, everybody's turn. But always the people, the endless flood of people, shouting, carefree, throwing balls at grotesque heads for trumpery prizes which assumed great value for the moment, riding the flashing horses that went round and round and up and down as the mechanical music ground out its tunes, spinning on the great

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centrifugal discs that flung them off so relentlessly, sliding down light-houses on mats, being swung about in the Niagara barrel to the sound of their own screams, dipping and rushing with a roar of wheels down the breath-taking descents of the coasters. People, people, people, all different, but all alike in this place of simple joys, all screaming, being weighed, eating hamburgers and hot dogs, all flagging a little towards the close of day as their feet swelled and their backs began to ache. Husbands taking out the repressed angers of years as they threw balls at shelf after shelf of kitchen crockery, wives resting on the beach and eating thankfully something they had not themselves prepared, children wanting everything, and then too tired to play with the toys that had been bought for them. Concessionaires never failing in their patter, urging the holiday-makers on to work, under the guise of play, at earning cloth horses, dolls, china ash-trays, for a hundred times their worth. Concessionaires whose bright smiles, whose stock of jokes, whose good-humored repartee, whose brass throats, never gave out, dared not give out, till the public had all gone. Barkers who beat drums and shouted of the wonders behind painted curtains. Fat ladies, bearded ladies, living skeletons, armless wonders, legless wonders, strong men, mermaids, exhibition divers, weight-lifters, food sellers, soft-drink sellers, shouting, shouting. And always the people, the people, the people as distinct from the showmen. Folks and showmen—was how the folks thought of it. The public and folks, that was how the showmen thought of it. Coney Island day.

A day like any other to Mrs. Hoffman, to Axel, even to Maybelle, except for the awareness of the new element in her life, that meant smiling more than ever and telling newspaper men how happy she was. Axel spared time from his own performance to be photographed beside her, and he told the newspaper men how happy he was. And Dorothy smiled too and said how happy she was, and how Axel sure was a grand guy, and how she was not losing a sister but gaining a brother. And then everyone made jokes, and one newspaperman, with his straw hat pushed well to the back of his head, said: "Sure, you couldn't afford to lose sister, could you, girlie?"

And Dorothy smiled again, and minded nothing. A day distinct from any other to Dorothy. For she had made up her mind to pull down the pillars of the temple, to bring upon herself that which she had always dreaded, to meet it knowingly, not to let it steal upon her against her will. There would be difficulties, but she saw how to get over them if she exercised enough care. The vanity bag she used at supper was large enough to hold a table knife. Her habit, acquired through strict self-training, of ignoring what was going on around her ensured to a great degree that people did not notice

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did not wish them to about self. Slipping the knife under her pillow when she went to bed would be the chief difficulty. Perhaps she had better stuff the whole bag under, that would be safer. And then again the lying awake, the fading of the black footprints, the slowly moving ripples of the moonlight, the darkness, and the dawn, when it would be time to act.

She felt no compunction, no sorrow for her mother, for Maybelle. Axel had always been unreal to her save as the embodied threat of the future. She said good night as usual to Maybelle when Mrs. Hoffman had settled the pillows, Dorothy always clutching at her bag. Presently she heard the rhythm of Maybelle's breathing, and wondered suddenly, idiotically, if Axel snored . . . Then she slept, which she had never expected to do, and woke in a frenzy of alarm lest she had slept too long, for the sun was bright in a long line that slanted in at the open window and the black footprints showed up clearly on the ceiling. She listened. The German maid was moving about in the kitchen, soon the smell of breakfast, which, like most of the boarders, she and Maybelle took in bed, would begin to pervade the house, as it had pervaded, alternating with the smell of hash in the evening, so many hundred boarding houses where the Hoffmans had lived.

Moving cautiously, Dorothy felt for her bag, opened it, and took out the knife. She thanked the Big Showman, one of Whose jests she was, that she was left-handed, for, Maybelle lying on her right, the thing should be easy. She did not want Maybelle to suffer. She was saving her from the great dread that had always been an acknowledged factor in the lives of such as they; and to herself, though she was making that dread a fact, she was giving a brief hour or so of individuality. She had, from a wandering knife juggler, gained some lore of knife-work. If you struck to kill, you struck from below, with the blade flat, so that it slipped between the ribs easily, not from above, because then the knife might be turned aside by the bone. She poised her arm and struck.

She lay awake suffused with an exquisite sense of peace. She was Dorothy Hoffman, and for the first time in her life she was alone.

She dragged herself up, wondering a little that already her heart seemed to be thumping in an odd irregular manner, but not disturbed about it. Merely as a physical feat, that which she had done had been difficult and exhausting. To have bungled it would have been a worse horror, and the relief she now experienced made her feel faint. She lay back against her pillows till everything steadied into place about her once again, and she was capable of realizing that she was in no worse case than any other human being who was dying. In better case, she was savoring a freedom she

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had never known. Her body, still strong and full of life, could drag at Maybelle's without her worrying how her sister would be affected. After a lifetime of adjustments, of suiting her paces to another's, this was ecstasy, however few the hours might be in which she could enjoy it.

She moved a little this way and that in the bed with childish pleasure in her new liberty. The dead weight of Maybelle seemed odd and unaccustomed, for they had spent a lifetime in chiming their movements so exactly that it had become, after the first few years, the rarest thing in the world for one to feel the pull of the other. And always it had been Maybelle who had led. Now it was Dorothy who commanded action at her will. Let this heavy thing drag at her as it would, the beating of her heart, the current of her blood sent messages to no pulse save her own. She was free of a past not without its deep affection for her sister, but a past that had been filled always with the knowledge that that affection might turn to an unbearable hate. She was free of the menace of an abominable future.

She looked at Maybelle's quiet face, that had not even had time to be surprised, and knew no menace in the fact that the same quietness must in a few hours be hers. She did not feel that Maybelle was dragging her after her, although that was indeed the fact, for a yet stronger truth was that she, Dorothy, had of her own free will, the will of Dorothy Hoffman, forced Maybelle to go ahead of her. Her sense of triumph, of a complete individual act, guarded her from fear as from regret.

When her mother pushed open the door and entered with the tray, Dorothy turned towards her a triumphant face. Not all the screams, the rushing footsteps, the crowding faces, the useless doctors, could disturb her now. Even as the waves of nausea and the drifts of unconsciousness took her, each time a step deeper, into the dark pit whither she had forced Maybelle, her triumph persisted. For this brief period which she had always feared, and which she had robbed of its sly malignance, she was alone, and because she was at last alone she was beyond defeat.

At what point in this magnificent story did you first suspect the true relationship between Dorothy and Maybelle Hoffman? — that they were not only sisters, not only twins, but Siamese twins! If you will now take the trouble to read the story again, you will appreciate more keenly the superb craftsmanship with which F. Tennyson Jesse wove a hundred subtle clues into the writing — to reveal slowly but surely the shocking truth. And if you think of Siamese twins as a symbol, can you recall any other story you have ever read that illustrates more perfectly the crucial need "for brethren to dwell together in unity" all over the world?

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Most readers think of Georges Simenon as a French detective-story writer. Strictly speaking, this is not true. M. Simenon, whose real name is Georges Sim, was born in Liège, Belgium, and lived in Belgium until he was twenty years old. But this is splitting hairs too. M. Simenon's father was a Breton who emigrated to Belgium and married there — so let us honor both countries by calling Georges Simenon a Franco-Belgian envoy to our United Nations criminological convention . . .

It has long been thought that M. Simenon never wrote any short stories about his most famous detective, Inspector Maigret. A recent discovery placed in our hands a whole book of Maigret shorts — LES NOUVELLES ENQUÊTES DE MAIGRET (THE NEW INVESTIGATIONS OF MAIGRET), *published in Paris, 1944. Yes, we have already taken action. At least three of the Maigret shorts will appear in EQMM in the near future — an especially happy prospect for American fans!*

In the meantime here is another G. 7 detective story never before published in the United States.

THE CHATEAU OF MISSING MEN

by GEORGES SIMENON

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

THE impression may vary in strength according to the case; but for me this is always the most vivid memory which I retain from any investigation: this moment when you still know nothing, when you have only the few crude details which have reached the police, when you imagine the people involved according to your own temperament, when you are plunged into a new setting, often even into a part of the country which you've never known.

Excited people are awaiting you. The city or the town is alive with rumors. And these rumors hide self-interests which it will be your job to disentangle. You get off the train with a slight pang — a little, in effect, as when you throw your counters down on the gambling table.

When I was talking of all this one day to G. 7, he drily remarked, "Fine writing . . ."

But the proof that he is affected, even as I am, is that at such moments as these he is always silent.

On this occasion the setting and the slightest details of the drama so far as we had heard them were admirably suited to produce an impression. Chance had brought about our ar-

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rival at seven in the evening, and since it was October, night had already fallen.

First, a wretched bus to carry us from the city to the village. There, people waiting for us, spying on us, following us at a distance as we set out on foot for the chateau.

It was astonishing that G. 7 did not question a soul, that he went straight to his objective, scorning the evidence which the peasants would gladly have volunteered.

The countryside in the darkness . . . Flights of birds — strange noises for city-dwellers . . .

Then a dark lane, bordered by wind-bent poplars. At the end of the lane a black solidity, one tower standing out against the gray skies, the glowing dot of one window . . .

The shadows that followed us — all the village must have been treading silently at our heels . . .

At last the sound of the knocker which G. 7 raised and let fall heavily . . .

We must have waited at least five minutes. And I remember that my companion's hand remained in that pocket where he usually keeps his revolver. We could not know what awaited us.

What we had learned of the affair savored of nightmare, of phantasmagoria, of bedlam. In a word, three men had suddenly disappeared, in this very chateau on whose threshold we stood, and the fourth had been accused of the triple crime.

Now this fourth was the master of the chateau, the Count de Buc, who was said to have murdered his servants for reasons still unclarified.

We saw him now, leaning out from a window. The bus driver had warned us that he would surely defend himself with a rifle. Nothing happened. A few moments later the door opened. We made out a tall silhouette in the blackness of the hall, and a voice said, "The police, I imagine? Will you take the trouble to come in, messieurs?"

The door closed behind us. Then another opened and we found ourselves in a well-lit Gothic library.

The Count was tall, weary-eyed, pale with an inborn pallor, displaying a lassitude in each of his movements which evoked a certain touch of the grand manner. He did not invite us to sit down, but silently gestured to chairs for us. Then, with no transition, he began his narrative, the words dropping carelessly from his almost unmoving lips:

"I was waiting for you. It was natural that the canaille" — he indicated the park where the peasants had formed a silent mass in the night — "should meddle in my affairs . . ." He did not sit, but stalked up and down the room. "If we were still in Mexico, I should not have opened my door to you, but rather have sent a few large-caliber bullets flying in your direction. For over there I held to the principle of settling my own affairs for myself. But I must rehabituate myself to France and her customs . . . Meanwhile, may I ask what rank you hold in the police?"

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"Inspector," said G. 7.

"Is that sufficiently high that I may be spared the necessity of ten repetitions of my story, each time before some personage a trifle more hierarchically important? I have a horror of formalities . . . I have lived for twenty-five years in one of the most deserted regions of the world, over there, by the mouth of the Rio Grande. And I must tell you that whenever some individual came, in the name of this or that government, to collect taxes or to impose some other such red tape, we gave him the choice between flight and a bullet in his skull . . .

"When I left France, I was ruined. I had nothing left but this ancient château, itself only a ruin . . . I took along one servant, Vachet, who stayed with me until very recently . . . I turned my hand to everything, over there — cattle-breeding and prospecting, rubber and the more unlikely aspects of agriculture. I ended by discovering a silver mine and becoming exceedingly wealthy . . .

"I have mentioned my loneliness. The only company that I could find worthy of that name consisted of Vachet and three men who were at once my comrades in arms and my servingmen: Juan, the Spaniard — a fat Dutchman named Peter — and finally a sort of outlaw American named John Smith . . .

"You might say we always lived together. Together we drank, together we played cards. Together, when solitude weighed on us, we would saddle our horses and ride to the nearest city, some seventy miles away . . .

"When I was fifty, homesickness overtook me. I came back. I set myself up here with my four men — and the first thing which Vachet did was to leave me, and carry off a few thousand francs with him. I lodged no complaint; this was no case for the French police . . .

"Three weeks after that, I began to feel ill. I saw a doctor who, knowing nothing of my past life, assured me that I had always had a weak heart and that the least excitement would kill me . . ."

The Count grinned. He seemed to dominate everything about him. He spoke as a giant who had strayed among pygmies.

"What could you expect? They must, at all costs, make an impression . . . I know of no blood kin, but I am certain that, were I to die, vague cousins would crawl out of their holes to dispute my fortune. It was then that I resolved to make a will in favor of my three comrades who had remained faithful . . . who had, indeed, taken part in the creation of this fortune, who had suffered hunger and heat and fever-mosquitoes and Heaven knows what other trials with me . . .

"I trusted them. I was unfortunate enough to show them the will.

"A week later, I was taken ill after a meal.

"The next day, my illness took a turn for the worse.

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"The day after that, I analyzed my food and found arsenic.

"You understand? No sooner did my three ruffians know that they would be my heirs than they determined to inherit immediately.

"I have told you that I administered my own justice over there. I did as much here. I put them in irons and applied certain minor tortures which you would not understand . . . These idiot peasants have been perturbed because they have not seen my three rogues again. I could wait. I was waiting for you . . . .

"Since here in France it is the police who handle such affairs — which, I may add in passing, is a ridiculous arrangement — you may take them and do with them what you will . . .

"Here is the key. They are in the fourth cellar down — the one with no breathing vent."

And the man, lighting a cigar, suggested to us, "Do you wish me to show you the way? — Oh, you have nothing to fear! They are not dead. Like me, they hold on to life a bit more toughly than that . . ."

I am not capable of describing that atmosphere — hardly, indeed, of giving even an idea of my impressions. Less than five minutes later we were in the cellar, flashlights in hand, freeing the three men.

Not a word from them! Not one indignant outburst! As the Count himself had said, the mentality of these hardbitten wanderers was outside our ken.

We brought them back to the Gothic library. They made a wretched spectacle, their clothing stained and torn, their cheeks heavily bearded. And there was something of defiance in the twist of their lips and even in their postures.

"All three of you have been accused of attempting to poison the Count de Buc," announced G. 7, who seemed no more at ease than I was.

One of them, the Spaniard, opened his mouth, then shut it as though he deemed it wiser to say nothing.

But the American sidled up to the Inspector and whispered, "Don't you get it?" And fearfully, taking care that the Count should not see him, he pointed his index finger at his forehead in a significant gesture.

"Please leave me alone for a moment with these three men," G. 7 requested of the master of the house. The Count smiled, shrugged, and went out; we heard his steps on the flagstones of the hall.

"Nuts! Get it?" the American explained with a heavy accent. "It took him this way when we got back to France. He thinks the whole world's got it in for him, especially us. He won't budge without a revolver in every pocket. That's why Vachet got the hell out. We stuck around trying to bring him to. But all the time he's spying on us. Morning to night, night to morning, he thinks somebody's going to do for him. He pulled a trick on us to get us down in the cellar and locked us in. He's just not all there.

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Before this, he was a good guy with us. Over there, we were more like buddies than boss and servants. All he needs now is a little rest, some good care . . ."

There was a heavy mist outside now, but the peasants still waited silently in the cold wet park.

"How long ago did Vachet leave?" G. 7 asked.

"Three days after we hit France."

"What did he look like?"

"A little guy, very fat . . ."

"Did he have any relatives anywhere?"

"Search me. He said he wasn't going to stand being treated like this. He cleared out without ever saying where he was headed."

"The Count was already crazy then?"

"Damn right he was. Soon as he got on the boat he started to change."

"And over there, in Mexico, nothing happened that might have foreshadowed this coming madness?"

"Not a thing. Maybe it's the air over there . . . And down in the cellar he tortured us . . . We don't want to make any trouble for him. He's got to be looked after. Get it? He isn't responsible . . ."

"In short," G. 7 observed carelessly, "what he needs is an asylum."

They all agreed eagerly.

My companion opened the door and called out, "Monsieur le Comte! Will you come in for a moment, please?"

The Count was smiling sarcastically. His first words were, "They told you that I am crazy, did they not?"

"Exactly. They added that it was you who murdered Vachet . . ."

I no longer understood anything. My throat was choked. I looked about me as if I were struggling in a nightmare.

The master of the chateau had turned pale, despite the smile which he forced to his lips.

"I must add that I don't believe them," the Inspector went on. "Particularly since I know exactly where Vachet is . . ."

This time it was all four of them who fell to trembling as they stared at my companion.

"When did the Count die?" G. 7 asked in a dry voice.

The American was the best gambler. While the pseudo-Count mustered his indignation and the other two gaped around as though seeking some means of escape, he spread his hands in a mechanical gesture and murmured, "You called it. Take the pot."

The Count de Buc was buried in the kitchen garden. The autopsy was later to confirm the American's statement that he had died of a heart attack, the day after his arrival at the chateau.

"Which does not mean," G. 7 explained to me as the train bore us to Paris, "that they would not have killed him if his death had not occurred at just that moment. But that is pure supposition.

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"The Count arrives in France with his four companions. It is twenty-five years since he left the country. He has no immediate relatives. Even in the village, he is forgotten.

"He dies immediately upon his arrival. Since he has not yet made a will, the others are furious at the idea that they have lost at once their jobs and all chance of inheriting the fortune to which they themselves had contributed.

"Vachet is the only Frenchman in the group, the only one who knows the village. They bury the Count in secret. The servant takes his place, while Vachet is supposed to have cleared out. Notice that they are careful, in order to avoid the least suspicion, to describe Vachet to us as little and fat, for the Count was tall and thin. That put a flea in my ear. I mistrust antitheses . . .

"Vachet plays his role extremely well. The others pretend to be his servants. What happens then? What quarrel breaks out among them? I am inclined to believe that our friend Vachet takes so wholeheartedly to the legend that he becomes mad, that he believes that he is indeed the Count de Buc.

"His accomplices make game of him. If they appear to respect him in public, behind the walls of the chateau they are only so many equals. Vachet becomes indignant. They resent him. And he, becoming more and more the grand seigneur, locks them up.

"And when the affair is uncovered, the three rogues, rather than let the cat out of the bag — which would ruin all their hopes — attempt to have their accomplice locked up in turn.

"In an asylum he would cease to be a danger. They would remain the true masters of the chateau. But the scheme collapsed — and the American, at least, was courteous enough to admire my calling their truly fantastic bluff."

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Here is a delightful surprise — a short-short story by Ferenc Molnár, the world-famous Hungarian dramatist who wrote the unforgettably enchanting "Liliom" and the wise and witty "The Guardsman." Like so many other undecided young men, Molnár studied to be a lawyer; but all through his college days in Budapest and Geneva he had written stories and plays, and on his graduation he suddenly gave up all thoughts of being an attorney and became a newspaper reporter. It wasn't long before he had made a name for himself as a writer of clever, sophisticated, and cynical feuilletons. In the gay society of Budapest he was a familiar figure in the theatre and in the Bohemian circles. He did much of his work — "the light comedy which is really light, really innocent" — in cafés, talking and drinking while he worked, sitting up all night, sleeping in the daytime. One critic has said that Molnár "speaks always in an ordinary tone of voice and thus lends to all his work an air of intimacy and familiarity" — a quality you will find charmingly noticeable in the short-short story which we have selected to represent Hungarian humor-without-homicide.

THE BEST POLICY

by FERENC MOLNÁR

Monsieur Bayout, President of the National Farmers Bank, sent for his secretary Philibert one morning.

"Tell me, Philibert," he said, "who is this man Floriot down at our Perpignan branch?"

"Floriot? . . . That's the cashier. He's acting as manager temporarily. You remember, sir, the old manager, Boucher, died, and we haven't found anyone to put in his place yet. Floriot's looking after things meanwhile. There isn't very much business in Perpignan."

Monsieur Bayout took a letter from his desk. "Well, apparently he's robbing us. I've had this letter from Perpignan. It's anonymous, I admit, but . . ."

He handed Philibert a not very clean sheet of notepaper on which, in a somewhat unformed hand, the following lines were written:

To the President of the National Farmers Bank.

Dear Sir,

We farmers are putting our hard-earned savings in your bank at Perpignan, and one fine day we shall wake up and find it has gone bankrupt and all our savings are lost. It is bound to happen the way things are going on here. You probably don't know that the cashier, Monsieur Floriot, has been em-

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bezzling money for months past. He must have put away a tidy packet by now, but of course by the time you high and mighty gentlemen in Paris realize what's going on, all the money will be gone.

"Send an inspector down to Perpignan tomorrow, Philibert," the President said. "But tell him to be tactful, we don't want to upset the man. There's probably no foundation for the story."

Monsieur Floriot, temporary manager of the Perpignan branch, stared at the inspector from Paris with horrified amazement. "Inspect my books?" he echoed. "What, now? In the middle of the month? Without any notification? It's a bit unusual, isn't it?"

The inspector felt sorry for the agitated little man. "There's nothing to worry about, Monsieur Floriot. We do this at all our branches from time to time. The President gets these sudden fits. It's only a formality. I'll be through in half an hour."

"Yes, but people will talk, especially in a small place like this," Floriot wailed. "Everyone will be saying that I've been up to something shady. Think of the disgrace!"

"Nobody's going to know anything about it," the inspector said, a trifle impatiently. "That is, of course, unless you yourself talk. Well, can I see the books now?"

Two days later Philibert entered the President's room. "I'm able to report on the inspector's visit to Perpignan, sir. Everything is in order. Not a single sou missing."

"Good. One really ought not to pay any attention to these disgusting anonymous-letter writers. Thanks, Philibert."

Less than a month later, the President again summoned his secretary. "It's quite ridiculous," he said testily. "But I've had another anonymous letter about Perpignan. The writer declares that the books weren't properly examined. Apparently Floriot made such a song and dance about the whole thing that an accomplice had time to replace the stolen money. We really ought to have gone into the matter more thoroughly."

"Do we have to make another investigation?" Philibert asked ruefully.

The President drummed his fingers on the desk. "I don't like doing it. All the same, it's a duty we owe to our clients. If there is something in it, and people find out afterwards that we were warned, there'll be a nasty scandal. I'm afraid the only thing to do is send the inspector down again. And this time let him do the job thoroughly. I want to clear this up once and for all."

The same day three of the bank's most reliable inspectors set out for Perpignan. This time Monsieur Floriot was really taken by surprise. One of the officials kept guard over him, while the other two carried out a thorough examination of his accounts, lasting over four hours. They found

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nothing missing, and the books in perfect order.

"I only wish things were as satisfactory in all our branches," the chief inspector said, as he bade farewell to the completely shattered Floriot.

A week later: "Monsieur Floriot of Perpignan is waiting to see you, sir," Philibert announced.

Departing from his usual habit, Monsieur Bayout rose and advanced towards his visitor with an outstretched hand.

Floriot, however, gave a stiff little bow. "I've come to hand in my resignation, sir," he said.

"Your resignation? You can't mean that, my dear Floriot. Why?"

"You found it necessary to have my books examined twice running, sir. Naturally it caused a lot of talk. Even though I was proved to be an honest man, it made a bad impression. People are saying there must have been some good reason why the head office sent down twice to have my affairs investigated. My reputation's gone. I'm not a young man, and I have a wife to think of."

Monsieur Bayout was deeply moved. "I'll make it my personal responsibility to see that your name is cleared. Wait a minute, though. . . . The manager's job is still vacant, would you like to have it? No one could doubt your honesty then, could they? Yes, and you'll get a pretty substantial increase in salary, too . . ."

"You really mean . . ." Floriot stammered.

"Of course, of course, my dear fellow. The bank will be fortunate in keeping the services of so conscientious a worker."

Back at his home in Perpignan Pierre Floriot slid his feet into the comfortable felt slippers his wife handed him.

"At last!" he grunted, in a good-humored voice. "What's the use of being an honest man if nobody hears of it? I might have gone on being a cashier for years and years, and the people at the head office would never have known how honest I was."

"They know now!" Madame Floriot beamed, regarding her husband with admiration. "Those letters were a wonderful idea of yours. . . ."

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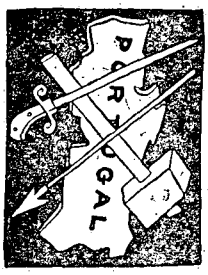
PRIZE WINNER FROM PORTUGAL: VICTOR PALLA



At the time Victor Palla submitted "The Maul, the Sword, and the Sharp Arrow" he was twenty-five years old, married, and an architect. (The last fact comes as no surprise: any aficionado would have deduced Mr. Palla's profession from a mere glance at the diagram illustrating the story; the floor-plan was drawn by the author.) Mr. Palla's complete name is Victor Manuel Palla e Carmo, and he tells us that Portuguese names are usually rather pompous, although only snobs make full use of them. Mr. Palla's wife is a painter; the author also paints on occasion, but he is better known in Lisbon as a commercial artist and book-jacket designer. A little over a year ago Mr. Palla published a detective-story anthology which he ambitiously titled A HISTORY OF THE DETECTIVE SHORT STORY. *Victor Palla himself translated the stories into Portuguese, and while the author-editor insists the book was not brilliant, it is still the only critical work of its kind in the Portuguese language. (Your Editor has never seen a copy of Mr. Palla's anthology; we are moving heaven and earth via airmail to persuade Mr. Palla to send us a copy so that our collection will contain the only Portuguese anthology in the genre.)*

Detective literature in Portugal, according to Victor Palla, is in a rather low condition. Indeed, Mr. Palla makes the positive statement that "not only isn't there a single Portuguese detective-story writer worthy of the name, but the books we translate are sensational and often anonymous works worse than those by your pulp magazine writers." Mr. Palla goes on to say that "names like Dorothy L. Sayers, E. C. Bentley, H. C. Bailey, Anthony Berkeley, John Dickson Carr, R. Austin Freeman, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Dashiell Hammett are totally unknown to the Portuguese reading public. Brazilian translations (Brazilian is slightly adulterated Portuguese) are scarce and too expensive. Now, at last, a publisher is trying to edit a Low Cost Collection of Detective Novels which so far has included Ellery Queen's HALFWAY HOUSE, *Agatha Christie's* MURDER IN MESOPOTAMIA, *S. S. Van Dine's* THE BISHOP MURDER CASE, *and a few others." The Portuguese public, Mr. Palla reports, is taking "to this initiation in true detective literature somewhat hesitatingly."*

"The Maul, the Sword, and the Sharp Arrow" is Victor Palla's first story. It was composed originally in Portuguese, then translated into English, and finally written out in longhand in Mr. Palla's interesting and

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artistic handwriting — we first read the story in holograph manuscript. The story was born during a family reunion when Victor Palla, his brother, and a cousin discussed detective literature and the question arose: Why not a Portuguese 'tec writer? And why not also a Portuguese sleuth? Thus Senhor Seabra came into being, and a few months later he solved his first case.

We cannot close this introduction to Victor Palla and to the Portuguese detective story without quoting two more sentences from Mr. Palla's letter. He wrote: "I was one of the countless writers and artists who joined the democratic and fruitless movement of October 1945 against the present dictatorship" and "Unhappily, I haven't much time for writing; one can't make a living out of writing in Portugal." Ponder those two remarks, dear reader: Isn't the United States of America truly God's country?

THE MAUL, THE SWORD, AND THE SHARP ARROW

by VICTOR PALLA

When his sister opens the door and Alberto walks into the house, his body frozen by the chill damp wind from the streets, the collar of his coat pulled up to his ears, he finds their grandmother in the self-same position: sitting on her big oak chair, between two pillows, her bony time-bit fingers crooked around the two knitting-needles, her pointed chin sunk in her chest. Always that same old black shawl crossed on her chest, torn and shabby, its ragged ends fallen on her thin forearms. The old woman lifts her eyes coldly, looking over her spectacle-frames, not moving her head, and answers with a dry short grunt to what she believes to be a "good night" from the young man. For Alberto has long ceased to salute her: the old hag is deaf and he now greets her with some brutal joke that she's unable to hear. "Hello, you old fossil," he says. The grandmother knits mechanically on, her hard thin fingers yellow in the lamplight, moving the needles up and down, up and down, on and on. The girl watches her brother with a mixture of reproach and repressed, malignant pleasure, feeling in her heart a laughter of freedom cut short by the rage of owing it to her brother.

Alberto sits on the armchair opposite the old woman's, his cold eyes held ironically on his sister, the flicker of a twisted smile twitching the corner of his thin lips. The girl sits on the edge of the sofa, her hands on her lap, tense, always waiting, with

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her brown, lank hair pulled back to her ears, with fear in her pale large eyes, feeling the weight of her brother's body on the armchair, feeling on her chest the pointed chin of the grandmother, thinking, *Again, my Lord. Always the same, Lord. Give me the strength not to succumb, my Lord,* fervently, *Maybe tonight he has come only to see me. Maybe he hasn't come for the money. Let it be so, my Lord.* She closes her eyes and hears the impassive, hollow ticking of the grandfather clock.

The old woman's peevish "Hand me that, young lady" comes from far away. The girl opens her eyes and crouches so that she may pick up the ball of thread her grandmother has let fall. She searches for the black wool clew, her white hand groping in the darkness beneath the armchair. She has to kneel down. The cracks in the bare floor hurt her knees. The crude light from her grandmother's lamp falls on her eyes as she rises and puts the clew in the old woman's hand. She stands first on one leg, then on both, brushing mechanically her knees, looking coldly at the old woman's wrinkles, at her white hair scrupulously combed and tied in a topknot, concretely not thinking a thing but feeling confusedly, *You signify nothing in this life of ours. You don't live. You're worthless. Alberto is right. And because of you, here I am dying alive. So that your body may go on dying, here I am not living mine,* wanting to crush against the floor that bent head.

Alberto lights a cigarette. Outside, a car groans by. The street! Oh, the joy in the night's chill air, in the lamps down the sidewalks, in the free women about the street corners! The girl sits down again, smoothing her skirt on her lap, letting her hand fall loosely on her knees, thinking, *Escape. The only way out. But I'm too much of a coward.* She remembers talking about it to Alberto — that was when he hit her in the face for the first time. Again she closes her eyes, stiffening her body with the recollection, closing a door against remembrance. And now she's hearing Alberto's voice. Her eyes closed, she can see him: he leans back in his chair, leisurely, smiling, his fair eyes steady on hers. The old woman can't hear, and the young man talks at his ease. But the hard strength in his words contradicts his bland, idle smile.

Dr. Luis Amaral takes his Homburg hat off and twice he lets the heavy brass knocker down. As he waits, he takes off his gloves and puts them in his overcoat pocket. He does not want to have them on while shaking hands with the girl. He gives a last touch to the perfumed white handkerchief in his breast pocket and waits. He looks at his watch. Thirty-five minutes past nine. He is late. He generally comes at half-past. He waits.

The girl's face startles him. "Your brother is here," he says, dryly. It's not a question. He walks in, taking abstractly the girl's thin hands in his, thinking, *The scoundrel. This can't go*

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on. One of these days I'll lose my head. The girl so far hasn't told him a word about it, but he knows of it long ago: her brother takes money from her and makes her take it from the household and from her scarce pin-money. The doctor feels a mule rage against the other, a sort of jealousy even of that power — not because of the girl, not because of what she may suffer, but because it hurts his pride to see that it is another who makes her suffer, who somehow possesses that frail body and that haggard face and those startled eyes. *The scoundrel*, he thinks, *the scoundrel*, his hate rising, as he hangs his Homburg in the hat-rack and puts his umbrella in the stand, instinctively watching his own elderly Don Juan figure reflected by the large mirror of the wardrobe that stands tall and wide in a corner of the hall. Well he knows the girl would be hurt if he told her he knows. And he keeps quiet. The girl is ashamed of the whole thing. The brother is a rascal. The old hag will not die so soon and her much-talked-of fortune is still far away, but Dr. Amaral knows that one can help an illness and that a family doctor has many ways. The old woman says she will disinherit her grandson, and the young man won't be better or worse off by her death — he may even lose by it, if Dr. Amaral marries the girl: then he will no more be able to take money from her. Dr. Amaral sighs. In the living room there is a veiled light; only the old woman's white head of hair, directly beneath the lampshade, gleams and quivers with the regular movements of her hands.

In the silent room, the young man doesn't move; the two men don't salute each other. The old woman looks at neither of them and is muttering incomprehensible things to herself. Her lips move with the soft noise of rain falling on tissue paper, as though she prayed. The doctor sits on the sofa, where the girl has been. He feels the warmth from her body. The feeling is like an intimacy, a touch unseen by the other two. Dr. Amaral is not a mere fortune-hunter. He is strangely attracted by that thin pale girl — hopeless, nobody's. For he loves her not only in spite of but because of her frailty and hopelessness, with an odd mixed feeling of pity and love, of sadism and fatherly benevolence. Not even he himself would know how to define his feelings. The only palpable and incontestable fact in the whole thing is the old woman's money, barren and unfruitfully locked, miserly pecked for the more urgent needs.

Alberto looks at the doctor. He lets his eyes wander on the other's graying hair, on the respectability of his elderly mustache, on his immaculately starched collar. A door in the attic has banged with the wind. Alberto thinks of his room in the boarding-house. The matron won't let him in till he gives her his over-due rent. He thinks, *I must fix my life somehow. This can't go on. Today I'll take some money like the other times. In a while I'll get rid of this guy and sis will give it*

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to me. But I can't go on like this forever. He thinks of his debts and the foodless days, of the nights in which he loses the money he promises to make last, and of the sour-mouthed mornings, thinking, *If I do not find a way out of the whole damned thing, I'm sunk,* knowing this to be but an excuse, knowing that after all he loves his wasted life; knowing that he will never be anything but sunk. Taking a fatalistic consolation in the irrevocableness of everything. He watches the doctor's graying and well-kept respectability with a feeling of contempt and nausea, sensing with a bitter pride that he would not swap his own haggard wasted face and his own trembling tobacco-burned hands for that shaven and powdered mask, for those soft white fingers resting on the fastidiously plaited trousers. He remembers his own figure in the large mirror of the hall. A waste. He stretches out his legs provokingly, displaying his muddy shineless shoes and his dirty ragged trousers, in a bravado that the doctor doesn't need to look at to see. For the other talks now to the girl, calmly, with a grave benevolence. The old woman knits on. Alberto does not hear the old man's words because he is listening to his thoughts. He reads the whole easy, inevitable plan hidden behind that well-kept mask. The shadow of the doctor's inexorable design falls black against the wall, fills the whole room. Alberto caresses the revolver in his pocket, feeling the steel warming up to his feverish touch, playing with the safety-catch, thinking, *A lump of lead could stop that blind confidence.* And he tries to find in himself the strength to pull the trigger and like a god change the future.

The clock strikes out the three quarters. The clock in the church tower answers. Alberto stands up. His sister recognizes this same moment, a hundred times lived before; hoping tensely for an error, a mistake in the natural order of things. *Maybe tonight he'll say goodbye and go without asking for money, without a thing. Maybe he'll be sorry for me,* she thinks, closing her eyes not to see in her brother's face the denial of that hope. "Can you come inside?" says the hoarse voice of Alberto from no distance, leisurely, without the need to make up useless excuses, watching with an insolent challenge the doctor's fixed gaze.

When the two walk into the kitchen, without a word, the girl turns on the light and closes the door behind her — an abrupt awkward gesture that shakes her frail body. All of a sudden everything seems to her of no importance; her brother is right and she'd better give him what he wants and put an end to the whole thing, the sooner the better. In the kitchen's yellow light her brother's haggard face, his uncombed straw hair, have a movingly childish and lost air; and the girl, prepared to fight an hostility, feels tears drowning her eyes, feels herself torn by that face like a lost little boy's. She is no longer

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afraid. She cries, all agony gone now. Oh, the relief in that crying! Her brother strokes her head clumsily, looking stupidly at his own bitten blunt fingernails, not thinking, feeling, *put an end to it. Quick. Quick.* But he doesn't know how to escape from the girl's sobbing body. Never so deeply has he felt the hollowness, the worthlessness of things; and that amoral feeling makes him paradoxically know for the first time the crime of uselessly torturing that sobbing creature that clutches the lapel of his shabby overcoat. Knowing, at the same time, that he will not go away until his sister opens the tin box where she keeps the month's money, until she goes out to the living room, her head bolt upright and her eyes dry. How many times has he envied that pride of not telling a thing to the doctor! But tonight she cries.

Alberto stands rigid in the middle of the kitchen floor, his arms hanging limp, looking gauntly at his sister who quietly repeats the gestures he would prefer not to see. In his mind lingers the phrase, *an end to this. Quick. Quick.* On and on, like ticking of a clock. The girl slips the money into his hand, bends, and with bent head to hide her crying, searches blindly for the storeroom door. She wants to walk erect and dry-eyed into the living room. She goes into the storeroom and leans against a shelf, her shoulders convulsively shaking, her face buried in her hands. In the kitchen the young man looks dazedly about him, the money in his hand. Then he goes into the passage that turns to the hall without passing the living room. The kitchen is left empty. Through the storeroom door he can hear the girl's smothered sobbing.

In the living room the doctor has been idly fingering the arm of the sofa, as though the old woman did not exist, jealous of the young man, self-confidently disposed to hasten the solution to the whole thing. But when he hears through the wall a dull sound of crying he feels that old hate growing and growing and making him stand up. Up, he hesitates, thinking, *I must put an end to this*, feeling those hollow sobs shatter his nerves. *I must.* He crosses the living room. He opens the kitchen door.

The old woman stirs in her chair and recommences the mechanical movement of her hands around the thread that comes up from the ball in her lap. Her dry, yellow fingers gleam beneath the lamp, like old ivory. She can no longer see very well; her knitting now and then seems very far away, lost in the haze of her lamp, then again it seems strangely near and real, every stitch a little concrete and lonely world. Looking over her spectacles she can see the doctor's figure on the sofa, his white hands on the dark overcoat. When the tips of her two bone needles strike each other, the old woman hears their short click — not with her ears, long past hearing, but with all her body,

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with her bones, with her arms, with all the existence surrounded by and locked in her old woman's skin. The borders of the world are narrowing for her — nearer every moment, closer, till there is nothing but a thin narrow strip of real interest in outside life. She does understand things, though. She knows, with a nightmarish clearness, that never so well has she understood them. Her granddaughter's young uncomplicated body, anxious to live. Her grandson, grown old without the knowledge of the old, who thinks he lives. The doctor, waiting for her death so that he may have her granddaughter and her money. Viciously she pulls the thread. Her mind is a swamp of still black waters that slowly sink in the damp earth, gradually, little by little. Little does she care about those who surround her! She feels the inexorable sinking and clutches these two neat and concrete needles as one clutches at reeds.

With the cold-hearted and pitiless calm of the very old, she analyzes impartially her miserliness and takes a sour and useless pleasure in watching the petty problems that she causes by it — like a little boy torturing ants with a straw, and like the little boy with a certain fascinated pity for the ants' twisted and ridiculous suffering. Deep inside her, not even thinking it, the old woman feels, *In you I endure the suffering that no longer is mine. In you I prolong the life that escapes me.*

The doctor stands up and she hears with his ears her granddaughter's sobbing in the storeroom. She watches him cross the living room and stop in front of the kitchen door. The black overcoat melts in the darkness; the doctor's white head and pale hands move about in space, loose. The old woman's eyes catch the details of that face like a respectable satyr's. When the doctor's figure disappears she lets her hands down. It is nearly ten o'clock and suddenly she feels out of patience. She will go to bed. The bedrooms are upstairs; the stairs start from the hall. The old woman puts the two needles together, wraps up her work, stands up on her benumbed legs. Malignantly she turns out the light. The room remains in darkness. Then she feels with her slippers the way to the door. In the dark the shuffle of her rope-soles on the bare floor and the old woman's subdued panting drown the ticking of the clock. She knows the way by heart, without thinking about it. Thousands of times her feet have trodden these same boards; her mind thinks of the time and bed, while her body is thinking, *To the right. Here's the stool. At the door I'll see by the light in the hall.*

Her hand feels the door-post. The hall is lighted by the lamp surmounting the single little window. Opposite her is the sturdy entrance door, of old dark oak. The stairs up are dimly visible in the half-darkness. The old woman looks down the hall. Then she halts. In the farther corner, dimly lighted, stands Alberto. She sees him raise his arm. Alberto seems not to be

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looking at her. But in his hand there gleams, metallic, a small object. *A revolver,* thinks the old woman. *A revolver. Then he has made up his mind,* she thinks, with a surprised indifference. She faces the young man. Both are alone in the hall. The old woman doesn't even think of screaming; she watches speculatively that still figure which to her aged eyes seems strangely distant and from another world, and which is reflected head over heels by the polished red tile floor. *Then death is like this,* thinks the old woman. She can hear her own blood pounding in her temples. In her back she feels the cold draft from the passage. *So it's like this, death,* she thinks, with a patient surprise. Alberto raises his hand. And when she sees that the young man isn't aiming nor looking at her, but at the passage behind her, the old woman closes her eyes — and hears with all her body the red explosion behind her and the fiery bullet that tears her back. *Then it wasn't him,* she thinks with surprise as she falls, *it wasn't him; then,* as she bends her knees and her head falls on the hard, cold floor with an endless hammering and pounding.

"Hmmrrff," said Senhor Seabra. On his desk he had the plan of the house. It was ten o'clock in the morning and in his office you could hear the continuous, hoarse din of the printing machines. He scratched his head. He coughed, with a noise like a cross between the starter of a motor and a tug-boat siren.

"Hmmrrfff," said Senhor Seabra. "And you say that the old woman is quite definite about it? She was facing the kid and with her back to the passage?"

"Quite," the other nodded. "She's still in danger and can hardly speak, but on that point she's clear. It's not with pleasure that she gives her grandson an alibi. Of course she would very much prefer to accuse him of having shot her. But she's afraid of lying with death and judgment so near."

"And the kid?"

"He's of no help. When we caught him, he didn't even speak. As we didn't know the old woman's story, we believed it had been the boy. And one would say he didn't care. Then the old woman told her story: and when he heard it he had to tell his. It runs like this: He took the money from his sister, he came through the passage, he went to the rack to fetch his hat, and he was about to leave when he saw the living room light go out. He waited near the rack and he saw his grandmother come out into the hall. Then he wouldn't tell a thing more. But when the old woman spoke again and said she had seen something gleaming in his hand, he had no choice but to go on and admit that he did have his revolver in his hand."

"Wait," said Senhor Seabra, palm outstretched. "That revolver. What gun was the bullet shot from? Was the gun found? And the kid's revolver? Have you seen it?"

"You know, it wasn't till long after

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that I thought about it seriously. Beside the old woman, on the floor, there was a revolver." He made a disgusted face. "It was covered with her blood. I didn't even touch it. Then we took her upstairs. When I came down again and remembered it, it was gone. The kid says it was his revolver and that it wasn't he who hid it again. Someone must have taken it, he says. I wonder who could be interested in doing such a thing — and why."

Senhor Seabra closed his right eye and twitched his nose thoughtfully. "And was it really the kid's revolver?"

"Who else? It fits the description."

"Description?"

"I forgot. The girl did admit she knew her brother had a revolver. One night he had shown it her, in a boy's bravado. And she told me the kind of gun it was: one of those little thing-amagigs with a decorated handle, much like a lady's toy. I don't know where he got it. Nor do I care. But his gun must have been that one all right."

Senhor Seabra unbuttoned his collar. The other proceeded:

"To me it seems that the kid was planning to murder his grandmother. You do not go visiting people with guns in your pocket. Maybe somebody anticipated him. He says that as the old woman came out of the living room, he heard steps in the passage behind her. He saw someone (and he does *not* know whom) with a gun aimed at the old woman. He took out his revolver, instinctively. He waited. Then he heard the shot, saw her fall, ran to her. He let go his revolver. That's all."

"Whew," said Senhor Seabra. "Fairy tales. The kid is afraid to talk, of course. The first part I believe well enough. He did leave the kitchen, he did go through the passage, he did go and fetch his hat." Senhor Seabra pointed the way with his pencil on the plan. In front of the wardrobe he drew a black circle, near which he wrote ALBERTO. "Very well. The old woman leaves the living room. She stands here," (he drew another circle and wrote by it OLD WOMAN) "opposite and facing her grandson. Then a bullet hits her in her back, shot from here." (A large X on the passage.) "Very funny. But I can't make myself believe the rest of the kid's tale. Either he did not see who shot the old woman (which is not natural) or he did see; and having seen, he must have seen who it was. It's yes or no. And why not shoot his own gun? Was he frightened? Afraid? Is he still afraid? Of what?"

Senhor Seabra's office in the typographic plant is a sort of glassmade closet from which he can watch the whole work room. Behind their employer's back the workers call it "the cage." Senhor Seabra also refers to his office as "the cage," careful that his workers won't hear the name and lose their respect for him. The cage has two armchairs, a desk, and a swivel chair behind it. On the desk there are always some flowers in an

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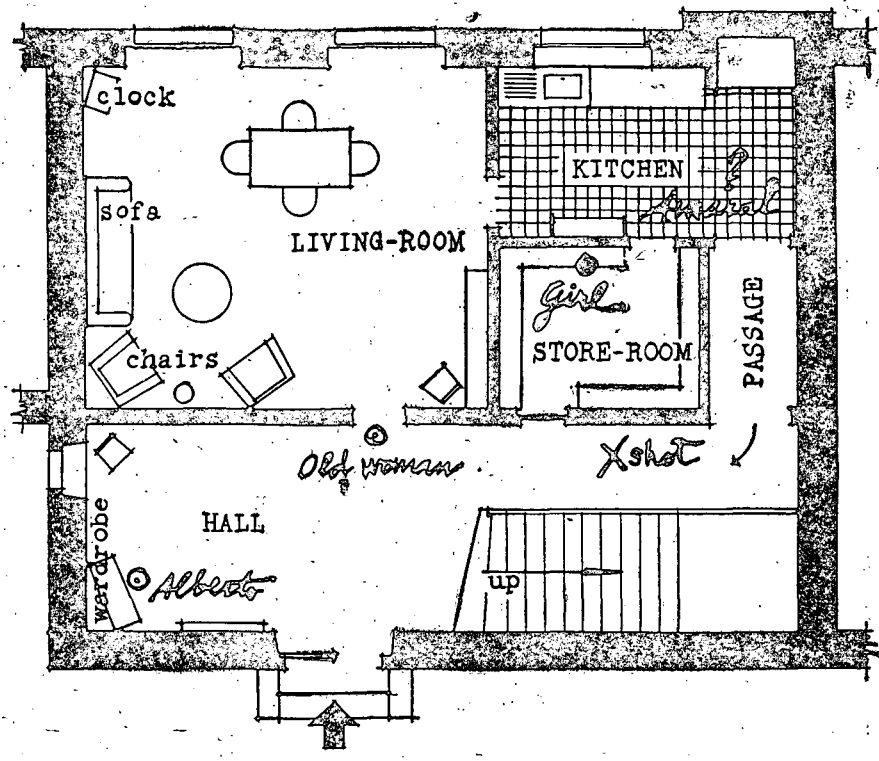
enormous orange vase. "A fancy of my Ana's," Senhor Seabra says apologetically. Ana is Senhor Seabra's wife.

"This plan ought to help us," said Senhor Seabra, smoothing the paper and studying the drawing. His friend had brought with him the ground floor plan of No. 81, Fernando Pessoa Street (4th District, Lisbon). By one of those coincidences that make us believe in miracles, the first person to knock at No. 81's door after the tragedy was — not only an old friend of the family, not only a friend of Senhor Seabra, not only a friend of Senhor Matos (the landlord), but his architect as well. And a search among



GROUND FLOOR OF Nº 81, FERNANDO PESSOA STREET

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old and long forgotten papers produced the sketch (designed in view of possible future repairs in the house) now on Senhor Seabra's desk. The architect had known Senhor Seabra since his schooldays and had come to him with the story.

"Have you compared all their stories?" asked Senhor Seabra. "Try to reconstruct the thing. First act: Everybody in the living room. Then, as you say, about a quarter to ten the kid and sis walk into the kitchen. Second act: Doctor and old woman in the living room, kid and sis in the kitchen. Presently the kid leaves through the passage, sis goes crying into the storeroom, Doc gets up. Third act: kid on his way to hall, sis inside storeroom, Doc opening kitchen door, and the old woman leaving the living room, with her back to the passage, facing the kid, is shot from behind; the kid is in the hall; and the other two?"

The architect pointed out the plan. "I told you. The doctor says he stood by the storeroom door, hearing the girl cry, not daring to go in. The girl says she didn't leave the storeroom — and as a matter of fact, she couldn't have done it."

Senhor Seabra scratched the nape of his neck with his pencil. "And this here door?" he asked.

"That door is locked since God knows when. I think they never saw its key, if there ever was one," said the architect. Then, "Look here, Seabra, I think the whole thing is easy as houses. Look at that plan. Why do you think I brought it? The doctor went into the kitchen. He didn't see the girl, who was hidden in the storeroom. He went ahead. He went through the passage. Turning to the hall, he saw the old woman leaving the living room, her back to him. He shot her, not knowing he was being watched by the kid."

"And why, son?" asked Senhor Seabra, open-mouthed.

"Why what?"

"Why everything. Why shoot the old woman? Why didn't the boy move when he saw him try to kill his grandmother? Why doesn't the kid tell on the doctor?"

"Ask me another," said the architect. "It wasn't me who shot the old woman. I'm nobody's grandson or doctor. Let 'em explain." And, seeing Senhor Seabra in earnest, "But, Seabra, don't you see? Who else could it be? That old blackguard Amaral sure is interested in the old woman's death. Everybody knows he is after her granddaughter *and* her money. And as long as the old woman lives he will get neither one nor the other. The kid couldn't shoot because he hadn't the guts to do it. And now he keeps his mouth shut because he is afraid of the other. Remember, he saw the doctor try to kill the old woman in cold blood. Besides, he may be thinking of blackmail."

Senhor Seabra shook his head sadly. "May Gutenberg bless you, son. What sort of rotten detective novels have you been reading? Ama-

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ral, indeed!" He pounded thunderingly on his desk with a steel ruler. Outside the "cage" the typographers lifted their heads, disinterestedly. They were used to it. "*¡Caramba!* Do you think this is one of your son-of-a-censor's detective novels?"

And as the other waited, "Hear, son. Have you the nerve to tell me you believe an old fox like your Amaral would be able to spoil his game that way? Shooting the old woman, indeed! If he wanted to kill her he could do it legally and send his bill to the family, besides. An impulse? Impulse my eye! That guy is as capable of impulses as I am of climbing a tree." He mopped his forehead with an ink-stained rag that he had absent-mindedly put into his pocket.

The architect had told him everything he had seen since he went into the house. He had found the old woman still lying on the floor, as if nobody had cared or dared to lift her. Blood was spreading slowly on the tile floor. The girl had opened the door to him; he had knocked directly after the crime; they thought he had knocked because he had heard the shot outside. The architect had held a rapid consultation with the doctor. The bullet had gone in beneath the left shoulder-bone, scratched a lung, and remained inside. They agreed on letting the case pass as an accident and early in the morning the old woman had been taken to the hospital. There, before and after the extraction, the grandmother had told her story — reluctant but true.

"The kid himself says that after she fell, the first one to turn up in the passage was Amaral," said the architect. "The girl appeared afterwards. So you see —"

"And what do they say about the shot? Where were they when they heard it?" asked Senhor Seabra.

"The girl says she heard it in the storeroom, just through the wall, which confirms that X of yours. Dr. Amaral says he was in the kitchen, and that he immediately ran through the passage. When he got to the hall he saw the kid kneeling by the fallen woman. He says he was sure then and there of the boy's guilt. Now he says he can't explain that shot from behind, but that he's still sure of the boy's guilt."

"*Credo qua absurdum,*" said Senhor Seabra. And again he looked at the plan, malignantly, with anger, drawing again and again the X from where the bullet had been shot. "There, there," he muttered viciously. "Ay, there's the rub."

"There," said the other. "One thing is clear: the gun was shot from the passage. On that you can't have a single doubt."

"Ay, ay," sighed Senhor Seabra. "I'll be inked and printed and dried. On that point I know I can't have a single doubt. Ay, ay," he sighed.

"I think we're evading the issue," cut in the other impatiently. "It was the doctor who tried to kill the old woman; how can we prove it?"

Senhor Seabra pounded impatiently on the desk top. "The —

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doctor — did — not — try — to — kill — the — old — woman," he said, underlining each word with his fist on the wood. "*¡Caramba!*" He studied the plan. He turned it around. He sighed. "Why does Amaral insist on the boy's guilt, when the one sure thing the kid couldn't have done was to shoot his grandmother?" he muttered, his pencil on the spot marking the old woman's position. "Why wouldn't the kid talk till she did? And why will he now not tell everything he saw?

"You know what, pal?" he said. He folded his arms on the edge of the desk and leaned forward a little, looking at the architect. "I even tell you this: if it were not for the old woman's statement, I'd swear it had been the kid. But definitely not the doctor. He's too cunning to kill noisily and publicly. That kind of guy kills only on the sly. And don't you forget it, m'boy." He drew a large question mark in the kitchen and wrote under it AMARAL. Then he remembered something. "Say: couldn't the gun have been shot from the living room?" He ran his big finger over the plan.

"No. I thought about that, too. First, because the kid says he saw someone in the passage. Second (even if the kid *is* lying), a bullet shot from the living room would hit the old woman's back on the right side, not the left. No. It was from the passage. Be reasonable, old man. It was from the passage — and it was Amaral."

Senhor Seabra inhaled deeply. He fingered the plan. Again he took his pencil. Then, unexpectedly, "I know the house," he said. "I was there once with Matos." (Matos was the landlord.) "But I don't remember some things. What's this here?" He indicated the right-hand upper corner of the plan.

"It's the kitchen window," said the architect, amazed that one shouldn't know so simple a thing.

"Of course it's the kitchen window," said Senhor Seabra angrily. "It had to be a window or a door. I wanted to know if it was a door. The house hasn't a back entrance, then?"

"No. The only entrance is the front one, into the hall."

"Yes. That one I know. Then nobody could have come from outside?"

The other eyed him wonderingly. "Of course not. Who do you think could have?"

"A murderer," said Senhor Seabra patiently. "So that I could convince you it wasn't Amaral." And he made casual idle lines on the edge of the paper.

"Then you can give up convincing me. Nobody did come in."

A pause. The typographers, outside, calmly worked on. The pounding and hammering of the machines passed through the partition glass. The architect said thoughtfully,

"There must be some very simple little thing evading us in the middle of all those facts. As a matter of fact, the old woman's tale — and the young man's — are strange indeed. First, an old woman seeing her grandson standing opposite her, quiet and

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still, a revolver in his hand, watching her as if he was in no hurry. Then that young man raising a revolver, the old woman closing her eyes, and being shot from behind. And the kid keeping cool and swearing he didn't see who shot the old woman. I don't pretend to understand it."

"Neither do I, son. You see, the important thing (and that very simple little thing you mentioned) is to know who is the maul and the sword and the sharp arrow. For, as you must have —"

"Wait!" cried the other. "Who is what?"

"The important thing is to know," said Senhor Seabra patiently, as if lecturing a pupil, "who is the maul and the sword and the sharp arrow. For —"

"All right," said the architect. "I heard it right. Go on."

But Senhor Seabra idly scribbled on the plan. "The old woman looks at the kid," he said, drawing slowly and thoughtfully a line from the circle marked OLD WOMAN to the one marked ALBERTO. "She doesn't happen to look into the passage. You'd think she did it on purpose, to cover up somebody." And he stroked the plan with his pencil. "The kid does look into the passage, but he prefers not to talk." He drew a line from ALBERTO to the X that marked the murderer's place. "Woman looks at Alberto, Alberto looks into passage," he said, eyeing with cocked head the angle he had drawn and pattering with his burly fingers on the desk top. Mechanically he drew the bisector to the angle — a line which stretched from ALBERTO to the closed storeroom door. The line told him nothing. Senhor Seabra turned the plan around and around, looking for some hidden relationship. Then he gave up and put it away. He pushed his hair back with an enormous sigh.

"Woman looks at Alberto, Alberto looks into passage," muttered the architect. "So what?"

"I don't know," said Senhor Seabra. "If she was a clever one, she could have seen in the kid's face who it was he was seeing behind her."

The other smiled. "Doesn't it sound a little complicated? She would have to be more than clever."

Senhor Seabra didn't answer. Instead, "I once saw a motion picture," he said reminiscently. "In it there was a guy who saw in his friend's spectacles a man who was going to attack him from behind," he said.

"But Alberto doesn't wear spectacles," said the architect, amused. "And they would have to be very large spectacles, indeed. Not to say, mirrors."

Senhor Seabra leered at the plan on his desk. Then he let go his pencil. For a full minute Senhor Seabra gave way to a rhapsody of words and phrases not even typeable, much less printable. The architect watched him, startled. And when the other returned to printability, he didn't find him more coherent. "The incident and reflected rays make equal angles with

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the normal to the reflecting surface, son," Senhor Seabra kept saying, shaking and waving the plan triumphantly. "They are coplanar with the normal." He stretched out the paper. "Look. Look, son."

He didn't seem to notice the other's open-mouthed amazement. He sat again (having stood up with the excitement) and for a moment he muttered, grinning in delight, "The son-of-a-censor! The son-of-a-censor! That kid surely took me in!"

The architect, who was used to Senhor Seabra, forced himself to be patient.

"Are you trying to suggest that the old woman could have seen someone reflected by the kid who was behind her in the passage?"

Senhor Seabra was still smiling. "I'll be censored," he muttered. He woke up. "What?" The other repeated his question. "Not quite," said Senhor Seabra. "Remember, son: the angle of incidence —"

"I know, I know," cut in the other, impatiently. "Equals the angle of reflection. But a young man can't do as a mirror."

"On the contrary," beamed Senhor Seabra, a large smile on his blissful face. "A mirror can do as a young man."

"What mirror?" cried the other. Then he froze in mid-air, wide-eyed. Understanding began to draw on his face an amazed smile. He bit his lip. He let fall his hand. He shook his head. "Could it be as simple as that?"

"It could and it was. Look, son. Your plan, which is accurate (bless you), clears the whole caboodle. Here's the incident ray" (and he pointed to the line X-ALBERTO) "and here's the reflected" (the line ALBERTO-OLD WOMAN). Of course, the bisector is normal to the closet door in which is the mirror. It's the normal. Old woman looks at mirror, *mirror reflects Alberto*. Old woman thinks Alberto faces her, Alberto is really *behind* old woman." Senhor Seabra aimed a fleshy finger at the architect. "Bang."

"And didn't she understand it was the mirror she was looking at? And didn't she see herself there, too?"

"She didn't because she couldn't." And he drew two more lines. "The mirror wasn't large enough."

"That means," muttered the architect, still almost unbelieving, "he was in the passage all the time, and she saw him in the mirror, and he shot her from behind —"

"Of course. And don't you see everything is clear now?"

"Could she really make such a mistake? After all, a mirror is still a mirror."

"There you're wrong. First, a mirror is made to reflect other things. And often — second — it's very difficult to tell an image from a real thing. Did it never happen to you? You go through a passage and suddenly you get quite a start because an unknown figure turns up from a dark corner — and then you see it was but your image in a mirror. To me it has happened more than once.

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And to everyone. It is not only bulls who smash mirrors with their horns because of the bull on the other side."

The other had become silent, thinking. "Even so," he said, letting his words fall, slowly, still hesitatingly, "how could she fail to see that it —"

"Of course she did fail to see that it —. Our mistake was to believe her story. Not that she wasn't sincere: we couldn't doubt it. But she could be untrue, though in good faith. Do you remember Gross's warning to detectives in general? Don't rely too much on the testimony of witnesses concerning happenings at moments where they are in a state of excitement, fear, or terror. The famous Gudor broke away during a walking exercise by suddenly attacking a warden. The latter, seeing a long knife in the hand of Gudor, fled. Gudor fled, too. When he was recaptured it was found that what he had actually brandished was a bloater, and the warden had mistaken this for a long knife. A bloater, son!" And he slapped pleasantly the desk top with his strong, heavy hand. The flowers shook in the vase. Some petals fell on the dark polished wood. "*When you fear the pigs in the forest, bushes growl at you.*"

"Do you think she was very frightened?" said the other, almost convinced.

"How could she not be? She was looking at a man prepared to kill her. That alone would be sufficient to blot the rest of it. Besides, her sight must not be a very great help to her."

"And that's why —"

"Exactly. That's why. The kid at first denied his own guilt by principle and instinct, I suppose. He simply wouldn't talk. Maybe he had decided to let them arrest him. Or to put a bullet into his own head. But when the old woman unexpectedly gave him an alibi by stating she had seen him facing her, he took his chance. He wasn't so dumb. Enter the maul, the sword, and the sharp arrow."

"Enter *what*?" cried the architect.

"— And he made up that story about a killer in the passage and so on," continued Senhor Seabra. "You see, son, the point of the whole thing was to know who was lying. Everybody could not be truthful. He was the one. He was accusing the doctor, of course. That was his second crime." Senhor Seabra raised a didactic and sententious forefinger. "For the Book says: 'The man that beareth false witness against his neighbor is a maul and a sword and a sharp arrow.' "

The architect exhaled, relieved, and Senhor Seabra continued: "Thus everything is explained. He hid the revolver to confuse the issue and because it could be proved to have shot the bullet found in the old woman's body."

"Yes," said the other pensively, "it must have been that way." The machines, which for some moments he had forgotten, again pounded outside. Outside the glass panes a boy passed, some papers under his arm. A clock had struck twelve. "Then it was Alberto — what could have made him do such a thing?"

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Senhor Seabra scratched his blotting paper with his short fingernails. "The reasons, though hard to explain, must have been real." He took the plan and began to roll it up, slowly, as he spoke. A petal got caught in the roll. "You see, son, the young man leaves the kitchen. He goes into the passage . . ."

. . . The young man leaves the kitchen. He goes into the passage, as he hears his sister lean against the storeroom shelves and cry softly and shakily. Behind him the kitchen is left empty: the yellow lamp shines on the clean floor and an impassive faucet drips regularly on the sink stone. The passage is dark and cold. Alberto sees some of the stair handrails, dimly lighted by the hall lamp and by the lamp in the passage; and a part of his mind remembers when he slept in the house and his grandmother hadn't yet put him out because he wanted to go out at night. He hardens his jaws till they hurt, while he feels his sister crying on his chest, wishing not to think about anything, so as not to be conscious of anything, as if by hardening his jaws he could lock himself against the quiet agony of being driven by a chain of useless and necessary fatalities. All this in seconds: he doesn't even think: in his mind coexist realizations of worthlessness, defeat, despair, in a block which is confused and incoherent but hard and sharp, terribly sharp and empty, hollow, dead. Over it all floats, like a fat big duck on a black pond, the doctor's solemn figure. That one knows what he wants. And his sister keeps sobbing in the storeroom, her face buried in her red and rough and work-worn hands. *What can she do but cry? What is there to do but cry?* he feels; *where to find the strength to stop the designs of an infernal machine of inevitable gestures and words?* He turns to his right, into the hall. A weak light shines dimly on the brass of the handrails. Down the hall the cold tile floor glitters. There's also a lamp on the farther wall, and the veiled light from the grandmother's lamp projects itself on the polished floor through the living room door. Then it goes out. Alberto stops. The old woman's figure, at the door, throws on the floor thin, transparent shadows. Alberto doesn't move. The old woman hasn't seen him. She faces the other way. Alberto sees her reflected by the tall mirror, black and ominous, motionless like fate. In the narrow passage the young man's heart pounds heavily, louder and louder, till it seems a wonder the old woman doesn't hear it. He'll let her go. He'll wait. He sticks his feverish hands into his overcoat pockets.

And the cold hard steel of the revolver throws a shiver up his whole wasted body . . .

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According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Anton Chekhov is almost universally regarded as the greatest Russian writer and as the greatest story-teller and dramatist of modern times. Chekhov's art, still quoting the Encyclopedia Britannica, has been described as psychological, but his psychology ignores the individual. His characters (still in the words of the E.B.) are not persons but just men and women, the genus homo, *an indifferentiated mass of humanity, divided into watertight compartments by the phenomenon of individuality, which does not make one being different from another but only inaccessible to him . . . To [Chekhov], better than to anyone, the words of Albert Thibaudet apply, that a Russian story is always the story of the undoing of a life.*

THE MALEFACTOR

by ANTON CHEKHOV

A TINY, very thin little peasant stood before the examining magistrate. He wore a striped shirt and patched trousers; his shaggy beard, his pockmarked face, his eyes scarcely visible under their bushy, overhanging brows gave him a harsh and forbidding expression, to which a mane of matted, unkempt hair added a spider-like ferocity. He was barefoot.

"Denis Grigorieff," began the magistrate, "come nearer and answer my questions. While patroling the track on the seventh of last July, Ivan Akinfoff, the railroad watchman, found you at the one hundred and forty-first verst unscrewing one of the nuts that fasten the rails to the ties. Here is the nut you had when he arrested you. Is this true?"

"What's that?"

"Did everything happen as Akinfoff reports?"

"Yes, just as he reports."

"Very well. Now, what was your object in unscrewing that nut?"

"What's that?"

"Stop your 'What's that?' and answer my question; why did you unscrew that nut?"

"If I hadn't needed the nut I wouldn't have unscrewed it," grunted Denis, glancing at the ceiling.

"What did you need it for?"

"What for? We make sinkers out of nuts."

"Whom do you mean by 'we'?"

"We — the people, the peasants of Kimoff."

"Look here, man, no playing the idiot! Talk sense, and don't lie to me about sinkers!"

"I never lied in my life," muttered Denis, blinking. "How can one possibly fish without sinkers, your honor? If you baited your hook with a shiner

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or a roach, do you think it would sink to the bottom without a sinker? You tell me I am lying!" laughed Denis. "A fine bait a shiner would make, floating on the top of the water! Bass and pike and eels always take ground bait; a floating bait would only be taken by a garfish, and they won't often take it. Anyway, we haven't any garfish in our river; they like the open."

"Why are you talking to me about garfish?"

"What's that? Didn't you ask me about fishing? All the gentlemen with us fish like that. The smallest boy knows more than to fish without a sinker. Of course, there are some people who don't know anything, and they go fishing without sinkers. Fools obey no laws."

"So you tell me you unscrewed this nut to use as a weight?"

"What else should I have unscrewed it for? To play knuckle-bones with?"

"But you might have made a weight out of a piece of lead or a bullet or a nail or something."

"Lead does not grow on every bush; it has to be bought; and a nail wouldn't do. There is nothing so good to make a weight of as a nut. It is heavy and has a hole in it."

"What a fool he is pretending to be! You act as if you were one day old or had just dropped from the clouds. Don't you see, you donkey, what the consequences of this unscrewing must be? If the watchman hadn't found you, one of the trains might have run off the track and killed everybody, and *you* would have killed them!"

"God forbid, your honor! Do you think we are wicked heathen? Praise be to God, kind master, not only have we never killed anybody, we have never even thought of it! Holy Mother preserve us and have mercy upon us! How can you say such things?"

Denis smirked and winked incredulously at the magistrate. "Huh! For how many years has the whole village been unscrewing nuts, and not an accident yet? If I were to carry a rail away, or even to put a log across the track, then, perhaps, the train might upset, but, Lord! a nut—pooh!"

"But can't you understand that the nuts fasten the rails to the ties?"

"Yes, we understand that, and so we don't unscrew them all; we always leave some; we do it carefully; we understand."

Denis yawned and made the sign of the cross over his mouth.

"A train ran off the track not far from here last year," said the magistrate. "Now I know why."

"What did you say?"

"Now, I say, I know why that train ran off the track last year."

"Yes; you have been educated to know these things, kind master; you can understand just why everything is; but that watchman is a peasant who doesn't know anything; he just grabbed me by the coat collar and dragged me away. One ought to judge first and drag afterward. But a peasant has the sense of a peasant. You might

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write down, your honor, that he hit me twice — in the mouth and in the chest."

"Another nut was found when your house was searched. Where did you unscrew that one, and when?"

"Do you mean the nut that was lying under the little red chest?"

"I haven't any idea where it was lying, but it was found. Where did you unscrew it?"

"I didn't unscrew it; it was given to me by Ignashka, the son of one-eyed Simon. That is, I am speaking of the nut under the little chest; the one in the sleigh in the courtyard, Mitrofan and I unscrewed together."

"Which Mitrofan?"

"Mitrofan Petroff. Haven't you heard of him? He's the man that makes fishing-nets and sells them to the gentlemen. He needs a lot of nuts in his business — a dozen to every net."

"Listen! In Article 1081 of the Code it says that 'Whoever intentionally commits an act of injury to a railroad, whereby an accident might result to the trains, and who knows that such an accident might result' — do you hear that? 'who *knows*' — 'shall be severely punished.' You could not but have known what this unscrewing would lead to. The sentence is exile and hard labor."

"Of course, you know that better than I do. We people live in darkness. How can we know such things?"

"You know all about it perfectly well. You are lying and shamming ignorance."

"Why should I lie? Ask anybody in the village if you don't believe me. They never catch a thing but roach without a sinker; even gudgeons will hardly ever bite unless you use one."

"Now you are going to begin on those garfish again!" smiled the magistrate.

"We don't have garfish in our river. If we let the bait float on the top without a sinker, we sometimes catch a perch, but not often."

"Oh, stop talking!"

Silence fell. Denis stood first on one leg and then on the other and stared at the table, winking rapidly as if he saw the sun before his eyes and not a green table-cover. The magistrate was writing quickly.

"I shall have to arrest you and send you to prison."

Denis stopped winking, raised his heavy eyebrows, and looked inquiringly at the magistrate.

"How do you mean — to prison? Your honor, I haven't time! I have to go to the fair to collect the three roubles that Gregory owes me for tallow."

"Stop talking! Don't interrupt!"

"To prison! If there was any reason, of course I'd go, but, living as I do — what is it for? I haven't robbed anyone; I haven't even been fighting. If it's the payment of my rent you are thinking about, you mustn't believe what the bailiff says, your honor. Ask any one of the gentlemen; that bailiff is a thief, sir!"

"Stop talking!"

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"I'll stop," mumbled Denis. "All the same, I'll swear under oath that the bailiff has muddled his books. There are three brothers in our family — Kuzma and Gregory and I —"

"You are interrupting me. Here, Simon!" called the magistrate, "take this man away."

"There are three brothers in our family," murmured Denis as two strapping soldiers took hold of him and led him out of the room. "I can't be responsible for my brothers. Kuzma won't pay his debts, and I, Denis, have to suffer! You call yourselves judges! If our old master, the general, were alive he would teach you judges your business. You ought to be reasonable, and not condemn so wildly. Flog a man if he deserves it — "

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H. B. Irving, elder son of Sir Henry Irving, was a profound student of criminology. He understood the psychology of criminals, and his book FRENCH CRIMINALS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY *made him a particularly appropriate person to introduce Maurice Level to English and American readers. In his foreword to Level's* TALES OF MYSTERY AND HORROR, *Mr. Irving points out that Maurice Level reminds us "of Edgar Allan Poe more than any other [writer of weirdness and horror]." Mr. Irving then reveals his acute critical perception by stating that Level "employs the method of O. Henry in the service of the horrible."*

You know the truth of Mr. Irving's observation if you read Maurice Level's "All Saints' Day" in our issue of December 1947. Here is another of Maurice Level's ironic insights — "The Debt Collector," which is probably one of the most plagiarized short stories in modern literature. We remember hearing at least two different versions of this story on the radio, neither making the slightest bow to Maurice Level, and one version broadcast, shockingly enough, by a top-ranking dramatic show. In this latter instance the code word was changed from the name Duverger to Heart's-Desire. So, if the story which follows seems vaguely familiar to you, take added pleasure in knowing that you are about to read the original version, as conceived by one of the most underrated masters of the French short story.

THE DEBT COLLECTOR

by MAURICE LEVEL

RAVENOT, debt collector to the same bank for ten years, was a model employee. Never had there been the least cause to find fault with him. Never had the slightest error been detected in his books.

Living alone, carefully avoiding new acquaintances, keeping out of cafés and without love affairs, he seemed happy, quite content with his lot. If it were sometimes said in his hearing: "It must be a temptation to handle such large sums!" he would reply quietly: "Why? Money that doesn't belong to you is not money."

In the locality in which he lived he was looked upon as a paragon.

On the evening of one collecting day he did not return to his home. The idea of dishonesty never even suggested itself to those who knew him. Possibly a crime had been committed. The police traced his movements during the day. He had presented his bills punctually, and had collected his last sum near the Montrouge

From "Tales of Mystery and Horror," by Maurice Level. Copyright, 1920, by Robert M. McBride & Company.

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Gate about seven o'clock. At the time he had over two hundred thousand francs in his possession. Further than that all trace of him was lost. They scoured the neighborhood and the waste ground that lies near the fortifications; the hovels that are found here and there in the military zone were ransacked; all with no result. As a matter of form they telegraphed in every direction, to every frontier station. But the directors of the bank, as well as the police, had little doubt that he had been lain in wait for, robbed, and thrown into the river. Basing their deductions on certain clues, they were able to state almost positively that the robbery had been planned by professional thieves.

Only one man in Paris shrugged his shoulders when he read about it in the papers; that man was Ravenot.

Just at the time when the keenest sleuth-hounds of the police were losing his scent, he had reached the Seine by way of the Boulevards extérieurs. Under the arch of a bridge he had dressed himself in some everyday clothes he had left there the night before, had put the two hundred thousand francs in his pocket, and making a bundle of his uniform and satchel, had dropped the whole, weighted with a large stone, into the river and had returned to Paris. He slept at a hotel, and slept well. In a few hours he had become a consummate thief.

Profiting by his start, he might have taken a train across the frontier, but he was too wise to suppose that a few hundred kilometers would put him beyond the reach of the gendarmes, and he had no illusions as to the fate that awaited him. He would most assuredly be arrested. Besides, his plan was a very different one.

When daylight came he enclosed the two hundred thousand francs in an envelope, sealed it with fixed seals, and went to a lawyer.

"Monsieur," said he, "this is why I have come to you: In this envelope I have some securities, papers, that I want to leave in safety. I am going for a long journey and I don't know when I shall return. I should like to leave this packet with you. I suppose you have no objection to my doing so?"

"None whatever. I'll give you a receipt."

He assented, then began to think. A receipt? Where could he put it? To whom entrust it? If he kept it on his person he would certainly lose his deposit. He hesitated, not having foreseen this complication. Then he said easily:

"*Mon Dieu*, I am alone in the world without relations and friends. The journey I intend making is — not without danger. I should run the risk of losing the receipt, or it might be destroyed. Would it not be possible for you to take possession of the packet and place it safely among your documents, and when I return I should merely have to tell you, or your successor, my name?"

"But if I do that . . ."

"State on the receipt that it can

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only be claimed in this way. At any rate, if there is any risk, it is mine."

"Agreed. What is your name?"

He replied without hesitation:

"Duverger, Henri Duverger."

When he got back to the street he breathed a sigh of relief. The first part of his program was over. They could clap the handcuffs on him now; the substance of his theft was beyond reach.

He had worked things out with cold deliberation on these lines: on the expiration of his sentence he would claim the deposit. No one would be able to dispute his right to it. Four or five unpleasant years to be gone through, and he would be a rich man. It was preferable to spending his life trudging from door to door collecting debts! He would go to live in the country. To everyone he would be Monsieur Duverger. He would grow old in peace and contentment, known as an honest, charitable man — for he would spend some of the money on others.

He wanted twenty-four hours longer to make sure the numbers of the notes were not known, and reassured on this point, gave himself up, a cigarette between his lips.

Another man in his place would have invented some story. He preferred to tell the truth, to admit the theft. Why waste time? But at his trial, as when he was first charged, it was impossible to drag from him a word about what he had done with the two hundred thousand francs.

He confined himself to saying:

"I don't know. I fell asleep on a bench. . . . In my turn I was robbed."

Thanks to his irreproachable past he was sentenced to only five years' penal servitude. He heard the sentence without moving a muscle. He was thirty-five. At forty he would be free and rich. He considered the confinement a small, necessary sacrifice.

In the prison where he served his sentence he was a model for all the others, just as he had been a model employee. He watched the slow days pass without impatience or anxiety, concerned only about his health.

At last the day of his discharge came. They gave him back his little stock of personal effects, and he left with but one idea in his mind, that of getting to the lawyer. As he walked along he imagined the coming scene.

He would arrive. He would be ushered into the impressive office. Would the lawyer recognize him? He would look in the glass; decidedly he had grown considerably older and no doubt his face bore traces of his experience — No, certainly the lawyer would not recognize him. Ha! Ha! It would add to the humor of the situation. . . .

"What can I do for you, Monsieur?"

"I have come for a deposit I made here five years ago."

"Which deposit? . . . In what name?"

"In the name of Monsieur . . ."

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Ravenot stopped suddenly, murmuring:

"How extraordinary . . . I can't remember the name I gave!"

He racked his brains . . . a blank! He sat down on a bench, and feeling that he was growing unnerved, reasoned with himself:

"Come, come; be calm! Monsieur . . . Monsieur . . . It began with . . . which letter? . . .

For an hour he sat lost in thought, straining his memory, groping after something that might suggest a clue. . . . A waste of time. The name danced in front of him, round about him; he saw the letters jump, the syllables vanish . . . Every second he felt that he had it, that it was before his eyes, on his lips. . . . No. At first this only worried him; then it became a sharp irritation that cut into him with a pain that was almost physical. Hot waves ran up and down his back. His muscles contracted; he found it impossible to sit still. His hands began to twitch. He bit his dry lips. He was divided between an impulse to weep and to fight. But the more he focused his attention, the further the name seemed to recede. He struck the ground with his foot, rose and said aloud:

"What's the good of worrying? . . . It only makes things worse. If I leave off thinking about it it will come of itself."

But an obsession cannot be shaken off in this way. In vain he turned his attention to the faces of the passers-by, stopped at the shop windows, listened to the street noises; while he listened, unhearing, and looked, unseeing, the great question persisted:

"Monsieur? . . . Monsieur? . . ."

Night came. The streets were deserted. Worn out, he went to a hotel, asked for a room and flung himself fully dressed on the bed. For hours he went on racking his brain. At dawn he fell asleep. It was broad daylight when he awoke. He stretched himself luxuriously, his mind at ease; but in a flash the obsession gripped him again:

"Monsieur? . . . Monsieur? . . .

A new sensation began to dominate his anguish of mind: fear. Fear that he might never remember the name, never. He got up, went out, walked for hours at random, loitering about the office of the lawyer. For the second time night fell. He clutched his head in his hands and groaned:

"I shall go mad!"

A terrible idea had now taken possession of his mind; he had two hundred thousand francs in notes, two hundred thousand francs, acquired by dishonesty, of course, but his, and they were out of his reach. To get them he had undergone five years in prison, and now he could not touch them! The notes were there waiting for him, and one word, a mere word he could not remember, stood, an insuperable barrier, between him and them. He beat with clenched fists on his head, feeling his reason trembling in the balance; he stumbled against lampposts with the sway of a drunken

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man, tripped over curbstones. It was no longer an obsession or a torment, it had become a frenzy of his whole being, of his brain and of his flesh. He had now become convinced that he would never remember. His imagination conjured up a sardonic laugh that rang in his ears; people in the streets seemed to point at him as he passed. His steps quickened into a run that carried him straight ahead, knocking up against the passers-by, oblivious of the traffic. He wished that someone would strike him so that he might strike back; that he might be run over, crushed out of existence. . .

"Monsieur? . . . Monsieur? . . ."

At his feet the Seine flowed by, a muddy green, spangled with the reflections of the bright stars. He sobbed out: "Monsieur? . . . Oh, that name! . . . That name! . . ."

He went down the steps that led to the water, and lying face downward, worked himself toward the river to cool his face and hands. He was panting . . . the water drew him . . . drew his hot eyes . . . his ears . . . his whole body . . . He felt himself slipping, but unable to cling to the steep bank, he fell. . . . The shock of the cold water set every nerve a-tingle. He struggled . . . thrust out his arms . . . flung his head up . . . went under . . . rose to the surface again, and in a sudden mighty effort, his eyes starting from his head, yelled:

"I've got it! . . . Help! Duverger! Du . . ."

The quay was deserted. The water rippled against the pillars of the bridge; the echo of the somber arch repeated the name in the silence. . . . The river rose and fell lazily; lights danced on it, white and red. . . . A wave a little stronger than the rest licked the bank near the moving rings. . . . All was still.

Announcement on *EQMM's* Fourth Cover Contest

The prize-winning story in *EQMM's* Fourth Cover Contest was THE DUMMY MURDER by Clarke Olney. Five other stories received Honorable Mention:

MURDER IS A FINE ART by *Eleanor Adams*
BETTER THAN ONE by *Derek Smith*
THE DUMMY by *R. L. Quinn*
NOT ENOUGH BLOOD by *Clarence W. Donnelly*
THE MAN WHO THOUGHT HE WAS CLEVER by *Augustus Traherne*

Because all our pages this month are being used to bring you a United Nations issue, THE DUMMY MURDER is being held over until next month.

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It is not generally known that Karel Čapek, the famous Czech dramatist, novelist, and essayist, wrote detective-crime short stories. Most people associate the name of Karel Čapek with scientific fantasies like the play "R.U.R." which dealt with the "mechanization of the proletariat" and gave to all the languages of the world the word "robot." In his work in the detective field Karel Čapek could be utterly and completely unfantastic: "The Coupon," you will discover, is a thoroughly realistic tale of pure detection — honest, patient leg-work, without benefit of microscopes and other highfalutin' paraphernalia. Or, to quote detective Souček, "a sound and solid piece of work" — aided and abetted, we hasten to inform you, by a brilliant series of deductions by Superintendent Mejzlik of the Prague police. Indeed, "The Coupon" illustrates to perfection the perfect blend of plain and fancy manhunting.

THE COUPON

by KAREL ČAPEK

ON THAT hot August evening the café by the river was crowded; and the consequence was that Minnie and Joe had to sit down at a table which was already occupied by a gentleman with a bushy, drooping mustache. "You don't mind if we sit here?" said Joe, and the gentleman merely shook his head. (What a horrid man, said Minnie to herself, to have sitting just at our table.) So first of all, Minnie with the attitude of a duchess sat down on the chair which Joe wiped for her with his handkerchief. And then, immediately afterwards, she took out her powder-puff and powdered her nose to make quite certain that it wouldn't get shiny in the heat. Just as she was taking out the powder-puff, a crumpled slip of paper fell from her handbag. Thereupon the gentleman with the mustache bent down and picked up the small slip. "You should keep that, young lady," he said in gloomy tones.

Minnie turned red, first of all because a strange gentleman had spoken to her, and then because she was annoyed at having turned red. "Thank you," she said, and turned briskly to Joe. "That's the coupon from the shop where I bought my stockings."

"Just so," said the melancholy man. "And you never can tell what use it might be, young lady."

Joe considered it his duty as a gentleman to have his say too. "What's the good of keeping useless bits of paper?" he remarked, without looking at the strange gentleman. "They only fill your pockets with litter."

"That doesn't matter," observed

From "Tales from Two Pockets," by Karel Čapek, 1943. Used by permission of The Macmillan Co.

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the man with the mustache. "Sometimes a thing like that's more valuable than you'd think."

Minnie's face assumed a strained expression. (The horrid man's going to poke his nose into our conversation. Why ever didn't we sit somewhere else?) Joe decided to put a stop to it. "How do you mean, more valuable?" he asked coldly, and raised his eyebrows. (How well it suits him, noted Minnie with satisfaction.)

"As a clue," muttered the horrid man, and by way of introduction added, "You see, I belong to the detective force. Soucek's my name. We've just had a case like that," he remarked with a wave of the hand.

"What case?" Joe couldn't help asking. (Minnie caught the glance of a young man at the next table. All right, Joe, I'll pay you out for talking to strangers.)

"Why, the woman they found near Roztyly," said the man with the mustache, and lapsed into silence.

Minnie suddenly became interested, most likely because there was a woman in the case. "What woman?" she blurted out.

"Why, the one they found out there," muttered Mr. Soucek of the detective force, evasively, and in some slight embarrassment he fished a cigarette out of his pocket. Whereupon something quite unforeseen occurred: Joe hastily dived into his pocket and produced his lighter.

"Thanks," said Mr. Soucek, evidently appreciative of the favor. "You know, some reapers found a woman's body in a cornfield between Roztyly and Krc," he explained, thus showing that he was grateful for the favor and was returning it.

"I never heard anything about that," said Minnie with startled eyes. "Joe, do you remember when we were at Krc? And what had happened to the woman?"

"She'd been strangled," remarked Mr. Soucek dryly. "She still had the cord round her neck. I can't very well say what she looked like, in front of the young lady here. You know, it was in July and she'd been lying there close on two months ——" Mr. Soucek disgustedly puffed out a mouthful of smoke. "You've got no idea what anyone looks like when they're in that state. Why, their own mother wouldn't know 'em. And then the flies ——" Mr. Soucek shook his head mournfully. "Young lady, once the skin's gone, there ain't much beauty left. And it's a deuce of a job to find out who it is. As long as they've got nose and eyes, there's still a chance. But when they've been lying in the sun for over a month ——"

"But there must have been some initials on the corpse," suggested Joe with the air of an expert.

"No such luck," muttered Mr. Soucek. "Single girls don't usually have initials on them because they says to themselves, it ain't worth while; I'll be getting married soon. No, there wasn't no initials on the woman."

"And how old was she?" inquired Minnie with close interest.

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"The doctor said, about twenty-five. By her teeth and so on, you see. And judging by her clothes she might have been a working-girl or a servant, but most likely a servant, because she had a sort of countrified petticoat. And besides, if it had been a working-girl, there'd have probably been some inquiries after her, because working-girls generally stay for some time in the same job or in the same lodgings. But once a servant changes her job, nobody knows anything about her and nobody cares. That's the funny thing about servants, ain't it? So we made up our minds that if nobody had been inquiring after her for two months, then she was most likely a servant. But the chief thing about it was the coupon."

"What coupon?" asked Joe eagerly. For he doubtless felt within him the heroic makings of a detective, a Canadian backwoodsman, a sea captain, or something of that sort, and his face took on that concentrated and energetic look which is all part of the business.

"Well, it was like this," began Mr. Soucek, and gazed moodily at the ground. "There was nothing whatever found on her. The chap who did her in had taken everything away that was likely to be worth anything at all. But in her left hand she still held a strap that had been torn away from a handbag, and the handbag without the strap was found a little way off among the corn. He probably had wanted to drag the handbag away from her, but when the strap broke, it wasn't any good to him, so he threw it away among the corn. But first of all he took everything out of it, see? So all that was left in the handbag was a tram-ticket of route No. 7, which had got covered up in a sort of fold, and a coupon from a china-shop, marking a purchase to the value of fifty-five crowns. That's all we found on her."

"But the cord round her neck," said Joe. "That's what you ought to have followed up."

Mr. Soucek shook his head. "That was only just a piece of clothes-line. That wasn't any good. We'd got absolutely nothing but the tram-ticket and the coupon. Of course, we had a notice put into the papers to say that the body of a woman had been found, age about twenty-five years, gray petticoat and striped blouse, and if any girl in service has been missing for about two months, kindly report same to police. We got over a hundred people coming forward with statements. You see, May's the month when these servant-girls mostly change their jobs, although nobody knows why. But none of these statements led anywhere. I tell you, it's no end of a job, following up a lot of particulars like that," said Mr. Soucek sadly. "You get a skivvy who was in service at Dejvice, say, and before you can find traces of her again at Vršovice or Košíře, why, it means running about all day long. And then it's all no use. The young hussy's alive and kicking, and has the cheek to laugh at you into the bargain. That's a nice piece they're play-

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ing now," he remarked, moving his head to and fro with approval, and keeping time with Wagner's Valkyrie music, which the band was playing with all its might and main. "Sort of sad, ain't it? I'm very fond of sad music. That's why I attend all the big funerals, to nab the pickpockets there."

"But the murderer must have left some clues," observed Joe.

"Do you see that chap there?" remarked Mr. Soucek with interest. "He goes after the offertory boxes in churches. I'd like to know what he's up to here. No, the murderer never left no clues. But let me tell you this much, that if you find a girl murdered, you can bet your life it was her sweetheart who did it. That's how it turns out," he said moodily. "Not that you need worry your head about that, young lady. So we wanted to know who'd done her in. But first of all we had to find out who she was. That was the hard part of the business."

"But the police have got their own methods for things like that," said Joe waveringly.

"Oh, of course," agreed Mr. Soucek glumly. "The same sort of method like, for instance, looking for a pin in a haystack. I tell you, you want lots of patience for a job like that. I like reading these here detective tales with all their talk about microscopes and what not. But what good would a microscope be to you for finding out about that poor girl? It'd be all right if you wanted to have a peep at this here fat worm, as happy as can be, taking his young 'uns out for a walk. No offense meant, young lady, but it always riles me when I hear them talking about method. You see, it ain't like reading a story-book and just guessing how it's all going to end up. It's more like as if someone was to give you a story-book and say: Well, here you are, you've got to read this word by word, and when you find the word *although*, just make a note of the page. That's the kind of job it is, see? No methods or smartness is going to help you there. What you got to do is to read on and on, and when you've finished you find out that the word *although* ain't in the book at all. Or you got to go traipsing about from one end of Prague to the other and discover the whereabouts of a hundred girls named Angelica or Maria, so that by detective work of that kind you can settle the fact that none of them's been murdered. That's what they ought to write about," he remarked in dissatisfied tones, "and not about the Queen of Sheba's stolen pearl necklace. Because, you see, when all's said and done, it's a sound and solid piece of work."

"And how did you set about it then?" asked Joe, who was certain beforehand that he would have set about it differently.

"How we set about it?" repeated Mr. Soucek pensively. "Why, first of all we had to have something to go upon, didn't we? Well, for a start we had that tram-ticket of route No. 7. Now suppose that this girl, if she was a servant, that is, was in service some-

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where near the tram-line; it may not mean anything, because she might have gone for a ride that way just by chance. Only we've got to take something for granted, if we're going to make a start at all, ain't we? The only thing is that, as it happens, route No. 7 goes from one end of Prague to the other. So that's no good and we can't do anything with it. Then there was that coupon. That showed at any rate that some time back the girl had bought goods to the value of fifty-five crowns in a china-shop. So we went to the shop."

"And did they remember her there?" Minnie gasped.

"Remember her, young lady?" growled Mr. Soucek. "Not they. But Mr. Mejzlik, he's the superintendent of our division, went and inquired what you could buy there for fifty-five crowns. All sorts of things, they told him, according to how many articles there were. But the only single article they sell for exactly fifty-five crowns is a tea-pot, big enough for one person. 'Well, let me have one then,' says our superintendent, 'but make it a job lot so that it won't cost so much.' So then the superintendent sends for me and says: 'Look here, Soucek, here's a job for you. Suppose this girl was in service. Girls like that are always breaking something, and when she's done it for the third time, her mistress says to her, you clumsy thing you, now you'll have to pay for it out of your own money. So the girl goes and buys just one article to replace the one she's broken. And the only thing that'd cost fifty-five crowns would be a tea-pot like this one.' 'That's damn dear,' I says to him. And he says, 'My good man, that's just the point. First of all it shows why the girl kept the coupon. It meant a mint of money to her and maybe she thought that some day or other her mistress would let her have it back. And then there's another thing. This is a tea-pot for one person. That means that either the girl was in service with a person on their own, or else her mistress had a person on their own as a lodger and they used to have their breakfast brought to them in this tea-pot. And this person on their own was most likely a female, because a man would hardly buy such a fine, expensive tea-pot, would he? Men don't generally notice what they're drinking out of. The most likely thing of all would be that it was an old maid, because when you get a spinster like that, in lodgings, she's always very anxious to have something nice of her own, and so she'll buy some needlessly expensive article.' "

"That's quite right," exclaimed Minnie. "I've got such a beautiful little flower vase, Joe!"

"There you are," said Mr. Soucek. "But you haven't kept the coupon belonging to it, have you? So then the superintendent says: 'Now then, Soucek, let's do a little more guessing. It's all damned uncertain, but we've got to begin somewhere. Well, now, look here; the person who can afford to spend fifty-five crowns on a tea-

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pot ain't likely to live at Žižkov.' (You see, Mr. Mejzlik had still got his eye on tram-route No. 7, that the tram-ticket belonged to.) 'There ain't many lodgers in central Prague, and the ones who live on the Malá Strana only drink coffee. If you ask me, I should say it would most likely be someone living between the Hradcany and Dejvice. In fact,' he says, 'I'm inclined to think that the lady who drinks tea from an English tea-pot like that can hardly live anywhere except in one of those small houses with a garden. You know, Soucek, that's the modern English style of place.' (You see, our Mr. Mejzlik, he sometimes has crazy ideas of that sort.) 'Now I'll tell you what, Soucek,' he says, 'you take this tea-pot and make inquiries in that part of the town to see whether any better-class spinsters are lodging in the neighborhood; and if any of them should happen to have a tea-pot like this, ask whether a servant left her landlady some time in last May. It's a damned weak clue, but it's worth trying. Now run along, old boy, this is your job now.'

"Well, you know, I've got no particular liking for all this guess-work; a good, straightforward detective ain't a star-gazer or a fortune-teller. It ain't no part of a detective's job to do a lot of fancy thinking. Of course, sometimes they manage to hit on the right thing by chance, but chance ain't what I call honest work. Now that tram-ticket and that tea-pot, they're at least something I can see; but all the rest of it is just a . . . a figment of the imagination," said Mr. Soucek, rather shame-faced to be heard using so learned a phrase. "So I set about it in my own way. I went from house to house in the neighborhood and asked whether they hadn't got a tea-pot of that sort there. And believe me or believe me not, in the forty-seventh house I went to, the servant says, 'Lawks! why the lady who lodges with the mistress has got a tea-pot just like that.' So I had myself announced to the landlady. She was a general's widow and let out two rooms to ladies. One of the ladies, a Miss Jakoubek, a teacher of English, had just such a tea-pot. 'Ma'am,' I says, 'didn't one of your maids leave you some time in May?' 'Yes,' says the landlady, 'that's right, we called her Marka, but I don't remember now what her other name was.' 'And did she break anything belonging to your lodger before she went?' 'Yes,' says the landlady, 'she did, and she had to replace it out of her own money; but my goodness me, how do you know about it?' 'Ah, ma'am, you see we get to know everything.'

"Well, after that it was plain sailing. First of all I discovered the maid that this Marka was pally with — it's a funny thing, a servant-girl is never pally with more than one other servant-girl, but she tells her everything — and I found out from her that the girl's name was Marie Parízek and she came from Drevíc. But what I wanted to know most of all was who this Marka was walking out with. She said it was a fellow named Franta; she

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didn't know what this Franta was, but she remembered that she'd once been together with the two of them in a dance-hall called Eden, and there another fellow had called out to this Franta: 'What cheer, Ferda!' Well then, this was handed over to a Mr. Fryba in our section — you know, he's the one who's got all these aliases at his fingers' ends. And Fryba said straight away: 'Franta, alias Ferda, that's probably the chap who calls himself Kroutil, but his real name's Pastyrík; he hails from Kosíre, he does. I'll go and fetch him, but there'll have to be two of us for that job.' So I went with him, although that ain't really my line of work. We collared him while he was with his girl; he got nasty about it and wanted to shoot. Then Superintendent Maticka took charge of him. I tell you, nobody knows how he does it, but in sixteen hours he managed to make this chap Franta or Pastyrík own up to everything, how he'd strangled this Marie Parízek in a hedge and robbed her of a few crowns, just when she'd left the place where she was in service. You see, he'd promised to marry her — they all do that," he added gloomily.

Minnie shuddered. "Joe," she whispered, "isn't it awful!"

"Not now it ain't," said Mr. Soucek solemnly. "But you know it was awful when we were standing by her body in that field and found nothing but the coupon and the tram-ticket. A couple of paltry, useless scraps of paper like that — and yet we managed to avenge that poor girl. As I said, you ought never to throw anything away, never; even the most useless thing may prove to be a clue or evidence. No, sir, you never can tell what important things you may be carrying in your pocket."

Minnie's startled eyes were full of tears. In a warm burst of affection she turned to Joe and her moist hand dropped the coupon, which all this time she had been nervously rolling into a pellet between her fingers. Joe did not notice this because he was gazing at the stars.

But Mr. Soucek, of the police force, noticed it and smiled sadly and comprehendingly.

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Gabriele D'Annunzio has been called "the greatest modern eccentric," and he did much during his seventy-five years of riotous living to earn that doubtful honor. Poet, playwright, novelist, propagandist, military leader, and great lover, D'Annunzio was like a burning flame: he wrote always in a half-delirious fever and in the end he consumed everything and everyone he touched. At the age of sixteen, he published his first work — a volume of poems titled PRIMA VERE, *at the age of thirty-one, with the appearance of his best known novel,* IL TRIONFO DELLA MORTE, *he was Italy's most popular author. His career in war and politics, his notorious love affairs, are not within our province — our interest in D'Annunzio is purely literary. Few would deny that he was one of the founders of realism in Italian fiction, and in this vein his* TALES OF MY NATIVE TOWN *is outstanding. From this book we offer you a story of robbery in the town of Pescara, a story of rustic ratiocination and comic crime — one of a series of tales of which Joseph Hergesheimer wrote: "for any who are moved by the heroic spectacle of humanity pinned by fatality to earth but forever struggling for release* TALES OF MY NATIVE TOWN *must have a deep significance."*

SORCERY

by GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

WHEN seven consecutive sneezes of Mastro Peppe De Sieri, called La Brevetta, resounded loudly in the square of the City Hall, all the inhabitants of Pescara would seat themselves around their tables and begin their meal. Soon after the bell would strike twelve, and simultaneously, the people would become very hilarious.

For many years La Brevetta had given this joyful signal to the people daily, and the fame of his marvelous sneezing spread through all the country around, and also through the adjoining countries. His memory still lives in the minds of the people, for he originated a proverb which will endure for many years to come.

Mastro Peppe La Brevetta was a plebeian, somewhat corpulent, thickset, and clumsy; his face shining with a prosperous stupidity, his eyes reminded one of the eyes of a sucking calf, while his hands and feet were of extraordinary dimensions. His nose was long and fleshy, his jaw bones very strong and mobile, and when undergoing a fit of sneezing, he looked like one of those sea-lions whose fat bodies, as sailors relate, tremble all over like a jelly-pudding.

Like the sea-lions, too, he was pos-

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sessed of a slow and lazy motion, their ridiculously awkward attitudes, and their exceeding fondness for sleep. He could not pass from the shade to the sun, nor from the sun to the shade, without an irrepressible impulse of air rushing through his mouth and nostrils. The noise produced, especially in quiet spots, could be heard at a great distance, and as it occurred at regular intervals, it came to be a sort of time-piece for the citizens of the town.

In his youth Mastro Peppe had kept a macaroni shop, and among the strings of dough, the monotonous noise of the mills and wheels, in the mildness of the flour-dusty air, he had grown to a placid stupidity. Having reached maturity, he had married a certain Donna Pelagia of the Commune of Castelli, and abandoning his early trade, he had since that time dealt in terra cotta and Majolica ware — vases, plates, pitchers, and all the poor earthenware which the craftsmen of Castelli manufactured for adorning the tables of the land of Abruzzi. Among the simplicity and religiousness of those shapes, unchanged for centuries, he lived in a very simple way, sneezing all the time, and as his wife was a miserly creature, little by little her avaricious spirit had communicated itself to him, until he had grown into her penurious and miserly ways.

Now Mastro Peppe was the owner of a piece of land and a small farmhouse, situated upon the right bank of the river, just at the spot where the current of the river, turning, forms a sort of greenish amphitheatre. The soil being well irrigated, produced very abundantly, not only grapes and cereals, but especially large quantities of vegetables. The harvests increased, and each year Mastro Peppe's pig grew fat, feasting under an oak tree which dropped its wealth of acorns for his delectation. Each year, in the month of January, La Brevetta, with his wife, would go over to his farm, and invoke the favor of San Antonio to assist in the killing and salting of the pig.

One year it happened that his wife was somewhat ill, and La Brevetta went alone to the slaughtering of the beast. The pig was placed upon a large board and held there by three sturdy farm-hands, while his throat was cut with a sharp knife. The grunting and squealing of the hog resounded through the solitude, usually broken only by the murmuring of the stream, then suddenly the sounds grew less, and were lost in the gurgling of warm vermilion blood which was disgorged from the gaping wound, and while the body was giving its last convulsive jerks, the new sun was absorbing from the river the moisture in the form of a silvery mist. With a sort of joyous ferocity La Brevetta watched Lepruccio burn with a hot iron the deep eyes of the pig, and rejoiced to hear the boards creak under the weight of the animal, thinking of the plentiful supply of lard and the prospective hams.

The murdered beast was lifted up

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and suspended from a hook, shaped like a rustic pitchfork, and left there, hanging head downward. Burning bundles of reeds were used by the farm-hands to singe off the bristles, and the flames rose almost invisible in the greater light of the sun. At length, La Brevetta began to scrape with a shining blade the blackened surface of the animal's body, while one of the assistants poured boiling water over it. Gradually the skin became clean, and showed rosy-tinted as it hung steaming in the sun. Lepruccio, whose face was the wrinkled and unctuous face of an old man, and in whose ears hung rings, stood biting his lips during the performance, working his body up and down, and bending upon his knees. The work being completed, Mastro Peppe ordered the farm-hands to put the pig under cover. Never in his life had he seen so large a bulk of flesh from one pig, and he regretted that his wife was not there to rejoice with him because of it.

Since it was late in the afternoon, Matteo Puriello and Biagio Quaglia, two friends, were returning from the home of Don Bergamino Camplone, a priest who had gone into business.

These two cronies were living a gay life, given to dissipation, fond of any kind of fun, very free in giving advice, and as they had heard of the killing of the pig, and of the absence of Pelagia, hoping to meet with some pleasing adventure, they came over to tantalize La Brevetta. Matteo Puriello, commonly called Ciavola, was a man of about forty, a poacher, tall and slender, with blond hair and a yellow tinted skin, with a stiff and bristling mustache. His head was like that of a gilded wooden effigy, from which the gilding had partly worn off. His eyes round and restless, like those of a race-horse, shone like two new silver coins, and his whole person, usually clad in a suit of earth color, reminded one, in its attitudes and movements and its swinging gait, of a hunting dog catching hares as he ran across the plain.

Biagio Quaglia, so-called Ristabilito, was under medium height, a few years younger than his friend, with a rubicund face, of the brilliancy and freshness of an almond tree in springtime. He possessed the singular faculty of moving his ears and the skin of his forehead independently, and with the skin of the cranium, as does a monkey. By some unexplained contraction of muscles, he was in this way enabled greatly to change his aspect, and this, together with a happy vocal power of imitation, and the gift of quickly catching the ridiculous side of men and things, gave him the power to imitate in gesture and in word the different groups of Pescara, so that he was greatly in demand as an entertainer. In this happy, parasitical mode of life, by playing the guitar at festivals and baptismal ceremonies, he was prospering. His eyes shone like those of a ferret, his head was covered with a sort of woolly hair like the down on the body of a fat, plucked goose before it is broiled.

When La Brevetta saw the two

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friends, he greeted them gently, saying:

"What wind brings you here?"

After exchanging pleasant greetings, La Brevetta took the two friends into the room where, upon the table, lay his wonderful pig, and asked:

"What do you think of such a pig? Eh? What do you think about it?"

The two friends were contemplating the pig in wondering silence, and Ristabilito made a curious noise by beating his palate with his tongue.

Ciavola asked: "And what do you expect to do with it?"

"I expect to salt it," answered La Brevetta, his voice full of gluttonous joy at the thought of the future delights of the palate.

"You expect to salt it?" cried Ristabilito. "You wish to salt it? Ciavola, have you ever seen a more foolish man than this one? To allow such an opportunity to escape!"

Stupefied, La Brevetta was looking with his calf-like eyes first at one and then at the other of his interlocutors.

"Donna Pelagia has always made you bow to her will," pursued Ristabilito. "Now, when she is not here to see you, sell the pig and eat up the money."

"But Pelagia? — Pelagia? ——" stammered La Brevetta, in whose mind arose a vision of his wrathful wife which brought terror to his heart.

"You can tell her that the pig was stolen," suggested the ever-ready Ciavola, with a quick gesture of impatience.

La Brevetta was horrified.

"How could I take home such a story? Pelagia would not believe me. She will throw me out of doors! She will beat me! You don't know Pelagia."

"Uh, Pelagia! Uh, uh, Donna Pelagia!" cried the wily fellows derisively. Then Ristabilito, mimicking the lamenting voice of Peppe and the sharp, screeching voice of the woman, went through a scene of a comedy in which Peppe was bound to a bench and soundly spanked by his wife, like a child.

Ciavola witnessed this performance in great glee, laughing and jumping about the pig, unable to restrain himself. The man who was being laughed at was just at this moment taken with a sudden paroxysm of sneezing, and stood waving his arms frantically toward Ristabilito, trying to make him stop. The din was so great that the window panes fairly rattled as the light of the setting sun fell on the three faces.

When Ristabilito was silenced at last, Ciavola said: "Well, let's go now!"

"If you wish to stay to supper with me . . ." Mastro Peppe ventured to say between his teeth.

"No, no, my beauty," interrupted Ciavola, turning toward the door. "Remember me to Pelagia — and do salt the pig."

The two friends walked together along the shore of the river. In the distance the boats of Barletta, loaded with salt, scintillated like fairy palaces of crystal; a gentle breeze was blowing

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from Montecorno, ruffling the limpid surface of the water.

"I say," said Ristabilito to Ciavola, halting, "are we going to steal that pig tonight?"

"And how can we do it?" asked Ciavola.

Said Ristabilito: "I know how to do it if the pig is left where we last saw it."

Said Ciavola: "Well, let us do it! But after?"

Ristabilito stopped again, his little eyes brilliant as two carbuncles, his flushed face wrinkling between the ears like a fawn's, in a grimace of joy.

"I know it . . ." he said laconically.

In the distance, his form showing black through the naked trees of the silver poplar grove, Don Bergamino Camplone approached the two. As soon as they saw him, they hastened toward him. Noticing their joyful mien, the priest, smiling, asked them:

"Well, what good news have you?"

Briefly, they communicated to him their purpose, to which he delightedly assented. Ristabilito concluded softly:

"We shall have to use great cunning. You know that Peppe, since he married that ugly woman, Donna Pelagia, has become a great miser, but he likes wine pretty well. Now, then, let us get him to accompany us to the Inn of Assau. You, Don Bergamino, treat us to drinks and pay for everything. Peppe will drink as much as he can get without having to pay anything for it, and will get intoxicated. We can then go about our business with no fear of interruption."

Ciavola favored this plan, and the priest agreed to his share in the bargain. Then all together returned to the house of Peppe, which was only about two gun-shots away, and as they drew near, Ciavola raised his voice:

"Hello-o! La Brevetta! Do you wish to come to the Inn of Assau? The priest is here, and he is ready to pay for a bottle or two — Hello!" La Brevetta did not delay in coming down the path, and the four set out together, in the soft light of the new moon. The quiet was occasionally broken by the caterwauling of love-stricken cats. Ristabilito turned to Peppe, asking in jest:

"Oh, Peppe, don't you hear Pelagia calling you?"

Upon the left side of the river shone the lights of the Inn of Assau, mirrored by the water. As the current of the river was not very strong here, Assau kept a little boat to ferry over his customers. In answer to their calls, the boat approached over the luminous water to meet the newcomers. When they were seated and engaged in friendly chat, Ciavola with his long legs began to rock the boat, and the creaking of the wood frightened La Brevetta, who, affected by the dampness of the river, broke forth in another paroxysm of sneezing.

Arrived at the inn, seated around an oaken table, the company became more jovial, laughing and jesting loudly, and pouring the wine into their victim, who found it easy to let the good red juice of the vines, rich

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in taste and color, run down his throat.

"Another bottle," ordered Don Bergamino, beating his fist upon the table.

Assau, an essentially rustic, bow-legged man, brought in the ruby colored bottles. Ciavola sang with much Bacchic freedom, striking the rhythm upon the glasses. La Brevetta, his tongue now thick and his eyes swimming from the effects of the wine, was holding the priest by the sleeve to make him listen to his stammering and incoherent praises of his wonderful pig. Above their heads lines of dried, greenish pumpkins hung from the ceiling; the lamps, in which the oil was getting low, were smoking.

It was late at night and the moon was high in the sky when the friends again crossed the river. In landing, Mastro Peppe came near falling in the mud, for his legs were unsteady and his eyesight blurred.

Ristabilito said: "Let us do a kind act. Let us carry this fellow home."

Holding him up under the arms, they took him home through the poplar grove, and the drunken man, mistaking the white trunks of the trees in the night, stammered thickly:

"Oh, how many Dominican monks I see! . . ."

Said Ciavola, "They are going to look for San Antonio."

The drunken man went on, after an interval:

"Oh, Lepruccio, Lepruccio, seven measures of salt will be enough. What shall we do?"

The three conspirators, having conveyed Mastro Peppe to the door of his house, left him there. He ascended the steps with much difficulty, mumbling about Lepruccio and the salt. Then, not noticing that he had left the door open, he threw himelf into the arms of Morpheus.

Ciavola and Ristabilito, after having partaken of the supper of Don Bergamino, provided with certain crooked tools, set cautiously to work. The moon had set, the sky was glittering with stars, and through the solitude the north wind was blowing sharply. The two men advanced silently, listening for any sound, and halting now and then, when the skill and agility of Matteo Puriello would be called into use for the occasion.

When they reached the place, Ristabilito could scarcely withhold an exclamation of joy on finding the door open. Profound silence reigned through the house, except for the deep snoring of the sleeping man. Ciavola ascended the stairs first, followed by Ristabilito. In the dim light they perceived the vague outlines of the pig lying upon the table. With the utmost caution they raised the heavy body and dragged it out by main force. They stood listening for a moment. The cocks could be heard crowing, one after another, in the yards.

Then the two thieves, laughing at their prowess, took the pig upon their shoulders and made their way up the path; to Ciavola it seemed like stealing through a wood with poached game. The pig was heavy, and they

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reached the house of the priest in a breathless state.

The next morning, having recovered from the effects of the wine, Mastro Peppe awoke, stood up in bed, and stretched himself, listening to the bells saluting the eve of San Antonio. Already in his mind, in the confusion of the first awakening, he saw Lepruccio cut into pieces and cover his beautiful fat pork-meat with salt, and his soul was filled with happiness at this thought. Impatient for the anticipated delight, he dressed hastily and went out to the staircase, wiping his eyes to see more clearly. Upon the table where he had left the pig, the morning sun was smiling in, but nothing was there save a stain of blood!

"The pig? Where is the pig?" cried the robbed man in a hoarse voice.

In a frenzy he descended the stairs, and noticing the open door, striking his forehead, he ran out crying, and called the laborers around him, asking each one if he had seen the pig, if he had taken it. His queries came faster and faster and his voice grew louder and louder, until the sound of the uproar came up the river to Ciavola and Ristabilito.

They came tranquilly upon the group to enjoy the spectacle and keep up the joke. As they came in sight, Mastro Peppe turned to them, weeping in his grief, and exclaimed:

"Oh, dear me! They have stolen my pig! Oh, dear me! What am I to do now? What am I to do?"

Biagio Quaglia stood a moment considering the appearance of the unhappy fellow, his eyes half-closed in an expression which was half-sneer, half-admiration, his head bent sideways, as though judging of the effect of this acting. Then he said:

"Yes, indeed! . . . One cannot deny it . . . You play your part well!"

Peppe, not understanding, lifted his face, streaked with tears.

"Yes, yes indeed! You are becoming very cunning!" continued Ristabilito with an air of confidential friendship.

Peppe, not yet understanding, stared stupidly at Ristabilito, and his tears stopped flowing.

"But truly, I did not think you were so malicious!" went on Ristabilito. "Good fellow! My compliments!"

"What do you mean?" asked La Brevetta between his sobs. "What do you mean? . . . Oh, poor me! How can I now return home?"

"Good! Good! Very well done!" cried Ristabilito. "Play your part! Weep louder! Pull your hair! Make everyone hear you! Yes, that way! Make everybody believe you!"

Peppe, still weeping, "But I am telling you the truth! My pig has been stolen from me!"

"Go on! Go on! Don't stop! The more you shout, the less I believe you. Go on! Go on! Some more!"

Peppe, beside himself with anger and grief, swore repeatedly.

"I tell you it is true! I hope to die on the spot if the pig has not been stolen from me!"

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"Oh, poor innocent fellow!" shrieked Ciavola, jestingly. "Put your finger in your mouth! How can we believe you when last night we saw the pig there? Has San Antonio given him wings to fly?"

"San Antonio be blest! It is as I tell you!"

"But how can it be?"

"So it is!"

"It can't be so!"

"It is so!"

"No!"

"Yes, yes! It is so! It is so, and I am a dead man! I don't know how I can ever go home again! Pelagia will not believe me; and if she believes me, she will never give me any peace . . . I am a dead man!"

"Well, we'll try to believe you," said Ristabilito. "But look here, Peppe. Ciavola suggested the trick to you yesterday. Is it not so that you might fool Pelagia, and others as well? You might be capable of doing that."

Then La Brevetta began to weep and cry and despair in such a foolish burst of grief that Ristabilito said: "Very well, keep quiet! We believe you. But if this is true, we must find a way to repair the damage."

"What way?" asked La Brevetta eagerly, a ray of hope coming into his soul.

"I will tell you," said Biagio Quaglia. "Certainly someone living around here must have done it, for no one has come over from India to take your pig away. Is not that so, Peppe?"

"It is well, it is well!" assented the man, his voice still filled with tears.

"Well, then, pay attention," continued Ristabilito, delighted at Peppe's credulity. "Well, then, if no one has come from India to rob you, then certainly someone who lives around here must have been the thief. Is not that so, Peppe?"

"It is well. It is well."

"Well, what is to be done? We must summon the farm-hands together and employ some sorcery to discover the thief. When the thief is discovered, the pig is found."

Peppe's eyes shone with greediness. He came nearer at the hint of the sorcery, which awakened in him all his native superstitions.

"You know there are three kinds of sorcerers — white ones, pink ones, and black ones; and you know there are in the town three women who know the art of sorcery: Rosa Schiavona, Rusaria Pajora, and La Ciniscia. It is for you to choose."

Peppe stood for a moment in deep thought; then he chose Rusaria Pajora, for she was renowned as an enchantress and always accomplished great things.

"Well, then," Ristabilito finished, "there is no time to lose. For your sake, I am willing to do you a favor; I will go to town and take what is necessary; I will speak with Rusaria and ask her to give me all needful articles and will return this morning. Give me the money."

Peppe hesitatingly took out of his waistcoat three francs.

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"Three francs!" cried the other, refusing them. "Three francs? More than ten are needed." The husband of Pelagia almost had a fit upon hearing this.

"What? Ten francs for a sorcery?" he stammered, feeling in his pocket with trembling fingers. "Here, I give you eight of them, and no more."

Ristabilito took them, saying dryly: "Very well! What I can do, I will do. Will you come with me, Ciavola?"

The two companions set off toward Pescara along the path through the trees, walking quickly in single file; Ciavola showed his merriment by pounding Ristabilito on the back with his fist as they went along. Arriving at the town, they betook themselves to the store of Don Daniele Pacentro, a druggist, with whom they were on very familiar terms, and here they purchased certain aromatic drugs, having them put up in pills as big as walnuts, well covered with sugar and apple juice. Just as the druggist finished the pills, Biagio Quaglia, who had been absent during this time, came in, carrying a piece of paper filled with dried excrements of dog, and asked the druggist to make from these two beautiful pills, similar in size and shape to the others, excepting that they were to be dipped in aloe and then lightly coated with sugar. The druggist did as he asked, and in order that these might be distinguished from the others, he placed upon each a small mark as suggested by Ristabilito.

The two cheats then betook themselves back to the house of Mastro Peppe, which they reached in a short time, arriving there at about noon, and found Mastro Peppe anxiously awaiting them. As soon as he saw the form of Ciavola approaching through the trees, he cried out:

"Well?"

"Everything is all right," answered Ristabilito triumphantly, showing the box containing the bewitched confectionery. "Now, as today is the eve of San Antonio and the laborers are feasting, gather all the people together and offer them drink. I know that you have a certain keg of Montepulciano wine; bring that out today! And when everybody is here, I will know what to say, and what to do."

Two hours later, during the warm, clear afternoon, all the neighboring harvesters and farm-hands, who had been summoned by La Brevetta, were assembled together in answer to the invitation. A number of great straw-stacks in the yard gleamed brightly golden in the sun; a flock of geese, snowy white, with orange-colored beaks, waddled slowly about, cackling, and hunting for a place to swim while the smell of manure was wafted at intervals from the barnyard. All these rustic men, waiting to drink, were jesting contentedly, sitting upon their curved legs, deformed by their labors.

Ciavola and Ristabilito did not keep them waiting long. Holding the box of candy in his hand, Ristabilito ordered the men to form a circle, and

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standing in the centre, he proceeded with grave voice and gestures to give a brief harangue.

"Good men! None of you know why Mastro Peppe De Sierri has called you here . . ."

His listeners stared questioningly at each other with a look of stupidity, then turned their gaze upon the curious and mysterious box which the speaker held in his hands. One of them, when Ristabilito paused to notice the effect of his words, exclaimed impatiently:

"Well, what is it?"

"I will tell you immediately, my good men. Last night there was stolen from Mastro Peppe a beautiful pig, which was all ready for salting. Who the thief is we do not know, but certainly he must be found among you people, for nobody came from India to steal the pig from Mastro Peppe!"

Whether it was the playful effect of the strong argument about India, or whether it was the heat of the bright sun cannot be determined, but at any rate, La Brevetta began to sneeze. The peasants moved back, the flock of geese ran in all directions, terrified, and the seven consecutive sneezes resounded loudly in the air, disturbing the rural quiet. An uproar of merriment seized the crowd at the great noise. After they had again recovered their composure, Ristabilito went on gravely, as before:

"In order to discover the thief, Mastro Peppe has planned to give you certain good candies to eat, and some of his old Montepulciano wine to drink, which will be tapped for this purpose today. But I must tell you something. The thief, as soon as he bites the candy, will feel his mouth so drawn up by the bitterness of the candy that he will have to spit it out. Now, do you want to try this experiment? Or, is the thief, in order not to be found out in such a manner, ready to confess now?"

"We wish to eat and drink!" answered the crowd in a chorus, while an excited motion ran through the throng, each man showing an expression of curiosity and delight at the portentous demonstration about to be made.

Ciavola said: "You must stand in a row for this experiment. Now, one of you is to be singled out."

When they were all thus formed in a line, he took up the flask of wine and one of the glasses, ready to pour it. Ristabilito placed himself at one end of the line and began slowly to distribute the candy, which cracked under the strong teeth of the peasants and instantly disappeared. When he reached Mastro Peppe, he took out one of the canine candies, which had been marked, and handed it to him, without in any way arousing suspicion by his manner.

Mastro Peppe, who had been watching with wide-open eyes to detect the thief, thrust the candy quickly in his mouth, with almost gluttonous eagerness, and began to chew it up. Suddenly his jaw bones rose through his cheeks towards his eyes, the corners of his mouth twisted

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upwards, and his temples wrinkled; the skin of his nose drew up, his chin became contorted, and all his features took on a comic and involuntary expression of horror; a visible shiver passed down his back, the bitterness of the aloes on his tongue was beyond endurance, his stomach revolted so that he was unable to swallow the dose, and the unhappy man was forced to spit it from his mouth.

"Oho, Mastro Peppe! What in the dickens are you doing?" cried out Tulespre dei Passeri, a greenish, hairy old goat-shepherd — green as a swamp-turtle. Hearing his voice, Ristabilito turned around from his work of distributing the candies. Seeing La Brevetta's contortions, he said in a benevolent voice:

"Well! Perhaps the candy I gave you is too sweet. Here is another one — try this, Peppe," and with his two fingers, he tossed into Peppe's open mouth the other canine pill.

The poor man took it, and feeling the sharp, malignant eyes of the goat-herder fixed upon him, he made a supreme effort to endure the bitterness. He neither bit nor swallowed it, but let it stay in his mouth, with his tongue pressed motionless against his teeth. But in the heat and dampness of his mouth, the aloes began to dissolve, and he could not long endure the taste; his mouth began to twist as before, his nose was filled with tears, the big drops ran down his cheeks, springing from his eyes like uncut pearls, and at last, he had to spit out the mouthful.

"Well, well, Mastro Peppe! What the dickens are you doing now?" again exclaimed the goat-herder, showing his white and toothless gums as he spoke. "Well, well! What does this mean?"

The peasants broke the lines and crowded around La Brevetta, some jeering and laughing, others with wrathful words. Their pride had been hurt, and the ready brutality of the rustic people was aroused and the implacable austerity of their superstitious natures broke out in a sudden tempest of contumely and reproach.

"Why did you get us to come here to try to lay the blame of this thing on one of us? So this is the kind of sorcery you have gotten up? It was intended to fool us! And why? You calculated wrongly, you fool! you liar! you ill-bred fool! you rascal!"

Having broken the wine flasks and all the glasses, they dispersed, shouting back their last insults through the poplar grove.

Ciavola, Ristabilito, the geese, and La Brevetta were left alone in the yard. The latter, filled with shame, rage, and confusion, his tongue still biting from the acridness of the aloes, was unable to speak a word. Ristabilito stood looking at him pitilessly, tapping the ground with his toe as he stood supported on his heels, and shaking his head sarcastically; then he broke out with an insinuating sneer:

"Ha! ha! ha! ha! Good, good, La Brevetta! Now, tell us how much you got for the pig. Did you get ten ducats?"

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PRIZE WINNER FROM AUSTRALIA: A. E. MARTIN

A. E. Martin won a Third Prize in EQMM's Second Annual Contest. In due time the story, "The Flying Corpse," was published in EQMM, but before the author could receive a copy of the issue containing his story, he wrote the following letter to your Editor: "As a prize winner in your last competition I should have written you long ago. I haven't even the excuse of the aboriginal who went walkabout on the eve of his wedding and turning up three months later said, in reply to the bride's questioning, 'I been fishing.' I haven't been anywhere since, on Yorke's Peninsula, South Australia, I wrote the story you have cleverly renamed 'The Flying Corpse.' . . . If you'll listen to extenuating circumstances, at the time I wrote my story I had never set eyes on your magazine. (The war was here, too.) Now, through my American literary agent, I have subscribed and know what I have been missing. Perhaps, in one sense, I have been lucky. If I'd known the high standard you set, I might have been scared off. Especially, in EQMM, I appreciate the friendliness of the forewords to the yarns and the critical notes following. This getting-togetherness of author, reader, and publisher strikes a spark of genius in magazine editing."

(Editor's Note: We love you, Mr. Martin.)

In due course Mr. Martin did receive a copy of the issue containing his prize story, and he wrote to your Editor again: "I have now received the September issue of EQMM and have been greatly interested (and amused) by the editorial matter following my story. I find it quite impossible to restrain myself from reading all the forewords before starting on any of the stories. So far as the comments are concerned, to me at least it is refreshing to find a magazine courageous enough to print a yarn and then point out its defects."

(Editor's Note: We love you, we love you, Mr. Martin.)

So, despite the fact that our editorial comments on Mr. Martin's story were not entirely laudatory — too often we have been accused of being too lavish with our critical praise, too panegyrical in our editorial endorsements — Mr. Martin kept right on sending us contest entries. In the Third Contest he submitted two manuscripts — and we bought both, one as a Prize Winner and the other as an original story. As you see, Mr. Martin doesn't easily "scare off" . . .

In your Editor's opinion there are no defects in Mr. Martin's second prize-winning story. "The Power of the Leaf" is an excellent tale, highly

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unusual in its conception and background, and extremely imaginative in its development. It is a pure detective story — and in the grand tradition of "new types of detectives" which EQMM has deliberately (we admit it) encouraged. Mr. Martin's never-before-thought-of sleuth is an Australian aborigine — Ooloo of the Narranyeri tribe. The year is 1847, in a territory, as the author tells us, where no man has yet planted seed. A fascinating time, place, and dramatis personae! True, Mr. Martin's detective is primitive, as is his villain, and their methods, detectival and criminal, are admittedly rudimentary; but if you dig beneath the surface of this story, you will find in it that passion for the truth, that questing spirit into the unknown, that investigative initiative, which is the possession of no single age or era. In its underlying and therefore more important meanings, "The Power of the Leaf" is as modern as a story about the F.B.I.

THE POWER OF THE LEAF

by A. E. MARTIN

IN THE YEAR 1847 Ooloo of the Narranyeri, busy with his boomerangs and wresting by violence a living from territory where, as yet, no man had planted seed, was delighted when the head-man put the message-stick in his hand and sent him on a peaceable mission to the neighboring Munamulla tribe. He took no arms with him but his boomerang and the throwing-stick carved for him by his young son, now grievously dead, and pointed with a barb made from a spike taken from a stingray.

Ooloo was old now and grayer than he had been a month ago when his son had been brought to him tossing his head, frothing at the mouth, and flailing his arms. It was all too evident, as the medicine-man had said, that someone had pointed a stick at young Oo-omal — a stick with several sharp, twisted prongs — and that the stick had entered the lad's body attached to an invisible string upon which some unseen enemy had pulled and thus brought about the painful quivering.

The medicine-man had watched his patient for an hour, crouching before the writhing form, and then, leaping abruptly, had succeeded in seizing and cutting the unseen string. Shuddering and moaning himself, he had sucked the place of pain, extracting for all to see broken pieces of the barbed stick. Gradually, Oo-omal's convulsions had subsided and it was plain to everyone that he had no more agony — plainest of all to his stricken father who knew he was dead.

As he tramped through the bush, his eye wary lest he be attacked before

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he could produce his symbol of peace, Ooloo thought much of the unknown enemy who had struck down his son. The medicine-man had been vague. The lad would have lived, he asserted, had he been brought to him a few moments earlier. The enemy? One of great power, living at a distance. He waved in a general direction and promised he would keep an eye open.

All this Ooloo had found unsatisfactory. Resting beneath a giant gum in the territory of the Munamullas, he meditated deeply, permitting himself the luxury of a thought that astonished and then intrigued him. Perhaps the medicine-man was not as powerful as he pretended. He began to wonder. Whence did these men derive their authority? From dreams, they said, but, after all, one had only their word for what they dreamed.

It would be very nice, Ooloo thought, to possess the influence of a medicine-man and live easily at others' expense.

Unyama, the Munamulla headman, received him courteously. He was in a genial mood. It had been a good season, game was plentiful, and the request of the Narranyeri not unreasonable. Besides, he loved to gossip and all he lacked was a new listener. It was a pity, he told Ooloo, he had not reached the camp a day earlier when he might have witnessed the trial of a young man who had murdered his hunting companion. The affair had had some interesting and puzzling features. Firstly, there was no dead body; secondly, the murderer himself had brought news of his friend's death; thirdly, the young man, owing to a certain popularity because of his gift for story-telling, had been offered the opportunity of admitting himself mad and thus, for his lifetime, enjoying all the privileges of the happy-minded — and had refused. And so, shortly, he must be speared to death by the uncle of the young man he had killed.

It was a pity, Unyama declared, that the tribe should lose one who was undaunted in the hunt, clever beyond his fellows in tracking and killing game, who had faithfully obeyed the injunctions of the old men at his initiation and had never been known to covet nor molest the young women. But the medicine-man, Urgali, had demanded the death sentence, maintaining that evil would befall the tribe if the murderer were not eliminated.

"If it is permissible, I should like to see this young man," Ooloo said, "for it would seem he has some of the qualities I saw in my own son and while I do not condone the murder of one's companions, you have said sufficient to intrigue me. I would I had arrived in time to hear his story from his own lips."

The guest had expressed a wish. Hospitality demanded that it should be fulfilled. Unyama thought of the tribe's well-stocked larder and the ease with which even the youngest children and the oldest gins could collect a meal of fat white grubs or

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caterpillars. They had plenty of everything and of all things of which they had an abundance they had most of Time.

"It shall be as you desire," he told Ooloo. "The Uncle of Kuduna can bring his poisoned spear tomorrow. Today we shall question Wendourie again and you, a stranger and therefore impartial, shall give us the benefit of your wisdom and advice."

Ooloo sat upon a tree stump in the place of honor beside the head-man. In a semi-circle before them sat the men of the tribe, the gray-heads squatting in the front rows, behind them the young bucks; at the rear and at a respectful distance, the women. On the outskirts, too far away for their noisy fun to distract, the children played.

"Let Wendourie be brought," Unyama ordered.

"Wait." It was Urgali, the Munamulla medicine-man, striding toward them. He was long and thin and the lines of pipe-clay drawn in half-circles from shoulder to hip and down the thighs and shins emphasized his height and his authority. He paused in front of the head-man. "Last night," he announced, "I projected myself into space. I saw many things on the earth below and much in the sky above. I searched behind the thickest and blackest clouds but I saw nothing to bear out the story Wendourie has told. Many heard me returning to earth. Is it not so?" he cried, throwing out his skinny hands in a gesture of appeal to the bucks.

"It is so," they shouted.

"I descended into a large tree and made my way through the branches. I was heard. Is it not so?"

"It is so," the young men cried again.

"And leaped to the ground in the presence of some, leaving my footprints for all to see. I twisted my ankle. Behold, I limp." He demonstrated, walking up and down, lamely, then, stopping in front of the head-man and Ooloo, folded his arms. "I have spoken," he said. "It is unwise to hold further talk upon this matter."

"We have a guest," Unyama said. "He cannot be deprived of our hospitality."

"Death waits for us all," Ooloo said, quietly. "It will not mind waiting a little longer for Wendourie."

"Besides," the head-man said, "it will pass the time of which we have more than enough." He called his guest's attention to the approach of a young man, guarded on either side by three bucks. "See, here is Wendourie. Let us hear his story again that our friend may carry word of our justice to the Narranyeri."

Ooloo, gazing at the young man who stepped, unarmed, before his head-man, felt a sudden tug at his throat, for here was his own son again. The same age, the same proud stance, the same clear eye flashing defiance.

"Wendourie," the head-man said, gravely. "Would it not be wise to confess that all you have said is but

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a fine story and one that will go down to our children and their children and be repeated at campfires long, long after we have all joined the spirits?"

"All I have spoken," the young man said, "is the truth."

Unyama said, "So be it. Here is a stranger who is our welcome guest. He would hear what you have to say."

Wendourie looked long and earnestly as if he would divine what manner of man Ooloo was. The old one said, "Be of courage."

Wendourie bowed. "When the stranger goes he will take the truth with him."

The medicine-man, Urgali, made an impatient gesture. "So be it," he said and pointed a skinny finger. "You, Wendourie, went forth with your friend, Kuduna. But you returned alone. *Why?*"

Wendourie folded his arms. "It is as I have said. A hole was suddenly in his forehead and he was dead."

"A small hole, you said?" The headman was anxious his guest should be impressed.

"No larger than the top of my thumb," Wendourie agreed.

Urgali cried, "So small a thing! Had I been there I would have sucked the place and spat out the magic."

Wendourie regarded him calmly. "Since you are so powerful, why did you not know what had happened?"

There was a murmur of surprise and awe at the boldness of the question. Unyama shifted uneasily on his seat, wondering how the medicine-man would take it, but Ooloo, with his own private views, found his heart warming to the young man. Urgali made light of it. He bent double and cackled with thin laughter. "Why did I not know, simple one?" he asked at length, looking toward the young men for support. "Because it never happened!"

The following laughter was quickly suppressed by Unyama. "This is not a campfire gossip," he said. "Let us behave with circumspection before our visitor. Let us make it plain to him what happened."

Urgali bowed low. "With all respect," he said, "I submit it should first be made plain to our guest that our young men are not so effete that they die from trifling holes in their foreheads."

"It is known far and wide that we are a hardy race," Unyama said. "Let us not dally with self-evident facts. Proceed, Wendourie."

The young man said, "We, Kuduna and I, were three days' walk from here when . . ."

Urgali was waving his arms, shouting, "Hear, you of the Narranyeri. There was wrongdoing from the beginning. Three days from here in the direction which Wendourie took would take him into the territory of the Koliju." He whirled on the accused man. "Did you carry a message-stick?"

"No."

"You were trespassing with evil intent?"

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"No. I did not realize where we were."

"So!" Urgali looked about him triumphantly. "The great hunter, Wendourie, was lost."

The young men in the semi-circle laughed and even the gray-heads smiled but Ooloo remarked smoothly, "It might be. Temporarily, of course. I myself, busy with my thoughts, have sometimes momentarily forgotten my exact whereabouts."

Urgali spoke with false deference. "But you, welcome one, are weighted with years. You have much to ponder. Wendourie, however, is young and without responsibility." He pointed an emaciated finger at the youth. "I suggest to you that you lured Kuduna into foreign territory the more easily to hide his body."

Unyama said, testily, "Let us get on with the matter of the magic tracks. Proceed, Wendourie."

The young man said, "Kuduna saw them first and called to me excitedly. It was late in the day but there was still time to follow them. They were like no tracks I have ever seen. At first they were a little confused but presently they became quite clear."

Unyama beckoned one of Wendourie's guards. "Bring two long sticks with blunt ends," he ordered and said in an undertone to his guest, "Now you will see something."

The medicine-man said, "We have had all this before."

"I am anxious to see and know all," Ooloo remarked, suavely, and presently Wendourie was holding the sticks that had been brought, one in either hand, trailing them after him, pressing their ends into the dusty ground, making two roughly parallel lines.

He explained to Ooloo. "Thus were the tracks, but thicker and even and always even, and ever between them great marks made by some monster."

"Bigger than the pads of the great kangaroo?" Urgali enquired.

"Bigger and different."

The medicine-man appealed to the gray-heads. "You who have hunted all your long lives, have you known pads larger than the giant kangaroo's?"

Unyama turned to Ooloo. "Wendourie thought they were the marks of spirits. Is it not so?"

"It was so," the young man agreed. "We were frightened and Kuduna was terrified by the sight and the strangeness of the smell but I persuaded him to follow the tracks. On and on they went, the two broad lines, never approaching each other and always with the same queer marks between, and suddenly Kuduna trembled and would go no further."

"But you," the medicine-man interposed with sarcasm, "were unafraid?"

"No," Wendourie said, gravely. "I was very frightened because of what I had seen in the tree."

"Tell our guest what you had seen," Unyama said, watching Ooloo to note the effect of what was coming.

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"Someone . . . something had grasped a bough in passing."

Unyama could not restrain himself. "Later," he told Ooloo, eagerly, "he saw that other boughs had been grasped and the yellow blossoms and leaves scattered and whole branches had disappeared."

"It is nothing," the medicine-man said. "Children at their games . . ."

"To grasp these branches," Wendourie said, "one would have had to sit upon my shoulders."

"To pluck the blossoms of which he speaks a man must needs be a giant," Unyama emphasized, anxious that his guest should thoroughly understand.

"I have a very clear picture," Ooloo said, dryly, and addressed the young man. "You think, Wendourie, the hand that grasped the high branches and scattered the yellow blossoms belonged to the monster which made the strange tracks between the parallel lines?"

"I did," Wendourie said, "and then I didn't know what to think."

"Listen to this carefully," Unyama bade his visitor quite unnecessarily for the Narranyeri man was absorbed in the recital.

Wendourie said, "Suddenly, in an open space, there were the tracks of a man."

"Coming from nowhere," Unyama implemented.

"Ah," the medicine-man smiled, "tell us, young man, of the origin of these miraculous tracks."

Unyama, greedy for his guest's reaction, was not disappointed when Wendourie answered, "They were made by a man without toes."

Urgali threw back his head and cackled. "And so," he cried, "now it seems we have two strange lines which never come closer each to the other, which is an impossibility as has been proved by every young man in the tribe who has experimented with trailing sticks; strange tracks of animals bigger than exist; and lastly, a man without toes!"

"It may be that his toes had been cut off," Ooloo suggested.

"Wait till you hear," Unyama said, his eyes bright. "Tell him, Wendourie."

"The toes had not been cut off," the young man said. "They were just not there; but the whole foot was the same shape and bigger than mine."

"Much bigger?" Ooloo enquired.

"Only slightly bigger," Wendourie explained.

"You are sure it was a man's track?"

"It smelled like a man's but not a man of our tribe, nor" — with a little bow to Ooloo — "of one of the Narranyeri."

"Answer the question," Urgali shouted. "Was it a man's track?"

"But for being toeless, it was a man's."

Urgali's contemptuous glance swept the semi-circle of tribesmen. "I ask the young men. I appeal to the grayheads. Where shall we find a toeless man? How would he climb trees? How pick up without stooping?"

The head-man smothered the titter

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that followed. "Silence," he barked. "The man's life may depend upon this." He whispered to Ooloo, "Now comes a very amazing statement."

Wendourie said, "The tracks made by the toeless one ran for a few yards alongside and outside one of the two, broad, parallel lines and then disappeared."

"But the tracks such as Wendourie has described, the two lines never varying in distance each from the other, went on," Unyama informed his guest.

Urgali bent his great height, stooping toward the young man in mock humility. "I am overwhelmed," he said. "I — Urgali who consort with demons . . . demons peaceably inclined toward the Munamulla," he added hastily, "I, who can leave my sleeping form in my hut and travel the heavens by night and am versed in all magic, am willing to be taught. What is the explanation for the sudden disappearance of the toeless man's tracks? Was the man absorbed into the earth? Did he fly into the sky? Did he evaporate?"

"I thought," Wendourie said, simply, "the monster had eaten the man."

"Tut, tut," Urgali protested. "You must do better than that. Had the tracks not abruptly appeared? Are you suggesting that this so-called monster was walking about alternately spewing out and gobbling up this remarkable toeless man?"

Unyama said testily, "Get on, get on. We are not here to listen to suggestions but to hear the whole story." He glanced at Ooloo for approval and signaled Wendourie to speak. Urgali, however, waved his long arms. "I think," he urged, "we are entitled to know what Kuduna thought of this miracle."

The young man said, "We were both very frightened. Kuduna said, 'Truly, here are signs of a magic-man more powerful than any we have known — one who makes our own medicine-man look like a child.' "

Unyama covered his thick lips with his hand to conceal his smile and with his elbow nudged Ooloo in the ribs, calling his attention to Urgali's scowl. "Continue, Wendourie," he said. "What Kuduna said or thought is immaterial."

"Night came," the young man continued. "We feared much but we heard nothing, saw nothing, smelled nothing. And in the dawn we saw that the tracks had gone."

"Very convenient," the medicine-man said with fine sarcasm. "Very convenient, indeed. Like the remarkable toeless man, this alleged monster which, apparently, was trailing a couple of large snakes, one in either hand, disappeared into space, snakes and all."

"It had rained heavily in the night," Wendourie explained. "I know of no tracks which will stand against such rain."

"You were three days' walk from here," Urgali snarled. "Only Kuduna could confirm this opportune rain. And so ends the first part of an in-

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genious story. It leaves Kuduna alive and well, if a little frightened, at what no doubt I could have easily explained had I been on the spot. Now we come to Kuduna *dead.*"

Unyama shifted uneasily on his tree stump. He whispered to Ooloo, "I am afraid, as a logical man, I cannot accept what Wendourie will now relate. However, I don't want to say anything to influence you." He motioned the young man to go on.

"Kuduna wished to return to camp but I persuaded him to stay," Wendourie said. "If the monster has eaten the toeless one, he will be no longer hungry and will spare us, I told him. And then, of a sudden, there was salt in our nostrils and I knew we must be close to the great water which Kuduna had never seen. In his eagerness I think he forgot the monster and the strange tracks. As we crept through the scrub a voice shouted and it was like no voice we had ever heard and what it said was meaningless to us. We crouched, trembling, behind a bush but none spoke again, and by and by Kuduna raised his head cautiously. '*Look!*' he cried in astonishment, and then there came the sound of a devil cracking a giant whip and it was as if the earth and the boulders about us had become alive with hidden monsters shouting one to the other.

"I looked at Kuduna and he had fallen and was lying very still and I saw that he had a little hole in his forehead. I shook him and he did not move, and I knew he was dead, and I was very frightened that one could be dead so swiftly and from so simple a hurt, and I turned and ran and ran."

Wendourie covered his eyes with his hands for a few moments before he went on. "But the shame of running away made me stop at last and wait, hiding. I heard nothing and could see nothing, and presently I decided to go back."

"Go back and face a thousand devils?" the medicine-man sneered.

"No; go back and get Kuduna and bring him to the camp."

"It is a pity you didn't carry out so noble a resolve," Urgali said. "I would undoubtedly have saved him."

Unyama whispered in Ooloo's ear. "He is very powerful in magic. I'm obliged to let him have his head a bit." To Wendourie he said, "Proceed."

"I went back slowly and very fearfully to the spot where I had left Kuduna," Wendourie told them, "but he wasn't there."

Urgali barked. "*Hah!* He was dead when you abandoned him but had gone when you returned. Tell us, brave boy, since when have the newly dead walked?" He smirked. "Come, come, Wendourie. Let us return to this thing Kuduna saw before the small hole came in his head. What had he seen?"

"I don't know," Wendouri admitted.

"Oh, but surely your fertile brain can invent something?"

"I invent nothing," Wendourie said with spirit. "The terrible whipcrack which woke the lurking demons

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frightened me so I fled at once."

"But having overcome this fear," Urgali urged, "what did you do?"

"I came back to the camp and told my story to the head-man."

"And a very good story it makes," the medicine-man said. "Unfortunately; it is no more than a story. And it lacks a happy ending."

"That is true," Unyama said. "If only you would admit you were mad, Wendourie . . ."

Urgali snapped, "He was not mad when he killed Kuduna."

A gray-head in the front row of the semi-circle arose and held aloft his spear. "I demand the life of this man who killed my brother's son," he said. "Let him be killed at once lest he talk his way out of punishment."

Ooloo said, "Patience, old one. Among the Narranyeri when there is a killing it is always asked, 'Why was this thing done?' Why, I ask you, should Wendourie kill his friend, Kuduna?"

The head-man gaped but Urgali shouted, promptly, "Why? Because the hot blood of youth leaps in his veins. If his secret heart spoke it would tell you he was jealous of Kuduna and some young woman."

Unyama pondered. "Nothing of that has reached my ears," he said at length. "Is it true, Wendourie?"

"It is not true," Wendourie said.

"Words are cheap on the lips of camp-fire entertainers," Urgali scoffed. "But, by tomorrow's dawn, all shall be known. With my magic I shall discover this woman who has remained silent and she will confess and provide the motive for this secret killing." He threw up his arms, palms out, subduing the murmur of the tribesmen and the distant gins. "Tonight will be an evil night," he warned. "Since the dead lies unavenged, let none stir from the huts in the hour before the dawn for there will be malignancy in the air." He addressed the head-man. "This night, Unyama, I will soar into the clouds and looking down, spy out that woman who is withholding evidence. I, Urgali the all-powerful, will confer with ghosts."

Unyama looked uneasy. "Very well," he said. "Wendourie shall be brought before us tomorrow. If this woman exists we shall question her."

"One moment, if you please, head-man," Ooloo begged. He leaned toward Wendourie. "Think well, young man. Is there not something that may help prove the truth of your story? Something which, perhaps, till now you have forgotten or refrained from mentioning."

Wendourie hesitated; then, with sudden resolve, he thrust his fingers into the folds of his 'possum-skin belt. He said, as he withdrew his hand, "This I will give to no man but Unyama or his guest."

Unyama frowned at what Wendourie was holding and held back, but Ooloo took it while the medicine-man peered. "It is a leaf," Urgali suggested.

"Have you ever seen such a leaf?" Wendourie asked. "Do you know of a leaf so thin or so white?"

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Urgali said, offhandedly, "In far parts grow many curious plants. This one has been blown hither."

"Examine closely," Wendourie invited the Narranyeri man. "You will note there are no veins."

"It is smothered in veins," the medicine-man contradicted as Ooloo held the thing up to the sun.

"No," Ooloo said, meditatively. "They are not veins because they connect with no common stem. There is no stem."

Unyama spoke uneasily. "Do you think, Wendourie, this thing was left by the monster of which you spoke?"

"I do not know," Wendourie said. "I saw it clinging to a bush."

"It is of no consequence," Urgali said. "It is evident that Wendourie seeks to divert our minds and delude us with this leaf he has happened upon. Drowning in his own infamy, he clutches at reeds. But I warn him, this pallid thing he has plucked from a bush of his imagining will not save him from the vengeance of Kuduna's kinsman. He may clutch at the reed but the waters of the billabong will close over him."

Unyama whispered to Ooloo, "He does this sort of thing rather well but, personally, it bores me."

It had not escaped the Narranyeri man's notice that, although Urgali ranted with assurance, he was a little puzzled and concerned about the thing he had maintained was a leaf. "This may mean much," Ooloo said aloud.

"Or little," Urgali scoffed. "If the thing were placed in my hands I would study it tonight and learn its implication."

"There is in Ooloo's hand something more powerful than medicine-men," Wendourie said, quietly.

"Pah," Urgali exploded. "More powerful than I, say you?" He frowned at the head-man. "Did I not suck devil-stones from your wife's cousin? Have I not a belt made from the hair of a witch's mother-in-law that will heal battle-wounds?" He went on, boastfully, "Can I not spit into a man's footmark and render him lame? And did I not and but recently, as a simple experiment, throw into the body of a total stranger, and at a distance, a barbed stick attached to an invisible string which I tugged — to bring first intolerable pain, then death?"

Unyama shuffled uneasily but Ooloo stiffened on his seat on the tree stump. "Are such things possible?" he murmured. "Is it really true, great Urgali, this matter of the barbed stick and the invisible string?"

"That and many other wonders have I worked with surprising ease," the medicine-man said, grandly. "Tonight I will float in the air and confer with ghosts. Tomorrow I will bring before Unyama the woman Wendourie coveted." He strode off, limping, and all waited in silence till he had disappeared.

Unyama sighed. "Oh, dear," he said, "now we've offended him. Wendourie has not helped his case by mocking him. Perhaps it would

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have been better had I permitted Kuduna's uncle to use his spear. However, tomorrow Urgali will tell us what the spirits advise and bring before us the young woman. We may then be able to put Wendourie to death with an easier conscience." He dismissed the assemblage.

In the early dark Ooloo left the stifling hut of the head-man, leaving him snoring by the fire, and made his way to where the young men were guarding Wendourie. Hospitality demanded they should open the way for him. "Young man," he began, when he was alone with the prisoner, "you spoke boldly, questioning the power of Urgali. Have you no faith in medicine-men?"

"In Urgali, none, welcome guest."

"And yet he has killed at a distance, throwing at a stranger an invisible barb held by an invisible string."

Wendourie considered this. "Since you say it, it must be the truth," he said, slowly. "I am bewildered. I have been taught to believe but often I doubt. There is this business of soaring in the clouds, for instance."

"Urgali has promised tonight to confer with ghosts."

"Tomorrow, when the sun rises," Wendourie said with a half-smile, "there will be a great rustling of leaves and shaking of branches in the highest gum-tree. Those who watch will see him leap to the ground. All will be able to follow his tracks back to his hut. But, if they searched, they would see also the earlier tracks he made when he walked to the tree in the darkness before dawn. They would see the marks on the bole and know that he had climbed *up* as well as down."

Ooloo regarded the young man steadily. "Then, if one dared be abroad at the dread hour before dawn about which your medicine-man warned the tribe, he might see Urgali on the way to his ghosts?"

"Is there one who would dare?" Wendourie asked. "I will tell you now there is none among the Munamulla." He shrugged his shoulders and added bitterly, "It will be said Urgali's ghosts are against me and he will drag before Unyama some timid girl out of whom he has frightened the wits and she will confess that I loved her and Kuduna loved her and it will be made manifest that I killed him because of my jealousy."

Ooloo took from his belt that which Wendourie had given him. "If this be a leaf," he said, "there is no leaf like it in all our world. With this strange thing a man might become mighty in magic."

Wendourie said, "I know not what it is but it has some connection with the monster whose tracks I followed and the devil-sounds I heard." he hesitated and asked, "Why do you speak to me with such kindness?"

"Because," Ooloo told him, "I believe you have spoken the truth even as my son who is grievously dead would have spoken. To none have I told this but he, too, questioned the magic of the medicine-men."

"And you?" Wendourie asked.

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"How much of it do *you* believe?"

"Some things I believe," the older man said simply, "but often, like you, I am bewildered. If at times there is deception, it does not follow there is never truth." He hesitated briefly and went on, softly, "If I had this leaf for my very own, I might accomplish much. Will you give it to me?"

"Is it not in your hands? I cannot take it from you."

"Nevertheless, I ask for it."

"You have been kind. It is yours."

Ooloo smiled. "With this magic I shall save your life."

In the morning, early, Urgali the medicine-man was found dead of a blow and lying beneath the tallest gum. His tracks made it clear that he had been going toward the tree and had almost reached the trunk when he had been struck down by the nulla-nulla found lying beside his body. The head-man had been barely awakened with the news than there came a wailing from the hut of the kinsman of Kuduna. The man's wife told how, in the dread hour against which they had been warned, her husband had heard a strange voice softly calling his name. She had begged him to ignore it but, vastly curious, he had put his head outside. No more than his head, she was sure, but she saw his whole body shoot into the dark without and he had not returned. She had waited, trembling, till dawn and found him but a few yards from the hut, lying beneath a small tree, his head mangled. A blood-stained nulla-nulla lay beside him.

When the old men had been summoned, Unyama said, "Urgali is dead. The uncle of Kuduna is dead. It is for us to discover who has done this violence."

"Who but Wendourie?" a gray-head asked and there was a chorus of approval. "Let him die at once."

Unyama shook his head. "Are we of lesser wisdom than the Narranyeri? Shall we not ask ourselves what reason Wendourie had for killing these men?"

An old man rose and said, mildly, "To me it is quite evident. Today Urgali was to have produced the young girl he coveted."

Unyama frowned. "True," he said. "Let Wendourie be brought."

Ooloo, standing beside him in the open space, suggested, "Let also the six young men who guarded him through the night be brought."

The head-man gave the order. "Let us be grateful for the wisdom of our welcome guest," he said to the gray-heads. "Since he is a stranger and impartial, I propose to let him question Wendourie."

The prisoner was brought, three guards on either side of him, and Ooloo asked, "How did you spend the night, young man?"

Wendourie looked surprised. "Why, how but in sleep?"

"And where?"

"Since I am a prisoner, all know that."

Ooloo beckoned a young buck.

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"Does he speak true? Did he once leave the hut?"

The man explained how guard had been kept. Always while three slept, three stayed awake.

"Here is undisputed evidence, trebly confirmed," Ooloo said. "Wendourie never left the hut and thus could not have killed Urgali nor the kinsman of Kuduna."

"Who then is the slayer?" Unyama asked.

Ooloo asked, "Who would be abroad in the hour before the dawn?"

"No one," Unyama said promptly. "Were we not warned by Urgali of the dread hour?"

"Then," Ooloo said, "since Wendourie slept and it is agreed that none other would venture out at the hour these men died, it is evident that the spirits are angry." Deferring to Unyama he asked that the nulla-nullas with which the two men were killed should be brought.

When the bloodstained weapons were set before him, he lifted one and held it by the ends, twirling it about, examining it closely while Unyama watched, fascinated. "It is as I thought," he said at last. "See, Unyama." He nodded his head and the head-man saw. In the centre of a blood splotch, adhering to the nulla-nulla by a bit of gum, was a piece of the strange leaf found by Wendourie. Ooloo took up the other nulla-nulla and there, also, was a piece of the leaf in the very midst of the horrid stains.

But Unyama had seen something else. "These are *my* nulla-nullas."

"It is very simple," Ooloo said, confidently. "The ghosts did not wait for Urgali but in their anger came for him." He looked at Unyama. "Since they used your nulla-nullas, it is evident that they were in our hut, invisibly, as we slept. Indeed, this much I know, for with the first streak of dawn I wakened and took from my belt the magic thing Wendourie had found clinging to the bush, and, behold, it was smaller." He fumbled for a moment and produced the strange leaf, holding it out to Unyama who took it with some trepidation. "Observe," he said, "that the two scraps on the nulla-nullas might be fitted perfectly into the larger."

Unyama said in awe, "What does it mean?"

"It means," Ooloo told him, "so long as any of this magic leaf remains, death will visit the tribe."

Unyama shuddered and hastily placed the thing he held on a tree stump. "Let no man touch it," he cried, largely, "till this matter has been investigated."

"It *has* been investigated," Ooloo said, coolly. "It is plain that the spirits are angry with those who demanded Wendourie's death. First, it was Urgali and he is dead; then the kinsman of Kuduna and he also is dead. Who else cries for his death?"

"Not I," Unyama said, hastily. "I always felt the boy was innocent."

One of the old men cried, "*Look*," and pointed. The "leaf" had fallen from the tree-stump and, fluttered by the breeze, was trailing along the

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ground. A tiny spiral of dust began to move toward it, growing in density, and presently it had become part of the incipient willy-willy. Caught by a current of air, it leaped up, dived, then rose abruptly and soared, straight and swift, over the gum trees.

And at that moment one came running, eyes wide, breathless with his news. "Unyama! Beside the hut of Kuduna's kinsman! The mark of the toeless man!"

Unyama's mouth fell open. Ooloo broke the awed silence. "It is not surprising," he said. "Did I not say the spirits were with us last night? The Toeless Thing is a creature of the ghosts which killed Urgali. Is it not a fact that many saw the tracks of Urgali moving toward the spreading tree, but who among us saw tracks of the killer?"

The old men sought each other's eyes, wonderingly. "There were no tracks," they said. "Only Urgali's."

When they had gone to investigate and Ooloo was alone with Wendourie, the Narranyeri man said, "The spirits have been kind to you."

The young man said, blandly, "And to you, clever one. May it ever be so." He looked about him, assuring himself none was within earshot. "It shall be a secret between us that you swung into the great gum from a branch on the west and climbing inward, waited till Urgali came from the east; then, leaning as he was about to reach up, struck. Afterwards you climbed to a far branch and leaped."

"You, too, are clever," Ooloo smiled. "But the tracks of the toeless one? Can this astonishing thing be explained?"

Wendourie showed all his teeth. "I have thought much since I first saw the toeless tracks," he said. "Those I saw cannot be explained but they may be imitated frighteningly by cutting bark in the shape of a man's feet and binding it to his naked soles." He added in another tone, "I am sorry your magic leaf was blown away. Do you really believe the spirits took it?"

Ooloo shrugged. "Maybe," he said.

Wendourie asked with diffidence, "Would I be impertinent if I asked your permission to accompany you on part of your return journey? I feel there is much I could learn from you quickly which, without you, only the years could teach."

In the middle of the next day Ooloo and Wendourie stood together on a high hill, their faces wet with the sweat of exertion, and gazed down upon an endless vista of trees which smothered the surface and hid the contour of the land, concealing plain and precipice alike. No thing stirred.

Ooloo pointed with his throwing-stick. "There lies my territory," he said. "Beyond the Narranyeri is the land of the Wirriwirri; beyond the Wirriwirri, the Bulpanarra and beyond them, 'tis said, a tribe so ignorant it has not yet learned how to procure water from gum scrub roots. But beyond . . . what?"

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"Nothing," Wendourie replied, promptly. "The world ends."

Ooloo blinked at him. "Perhaps. The great water . . . the great mysterious water," Ooloo said. "Even here the salt fills our nostrils." Half to himself, he murmured, "How strange if there were another side to it from which men might cross. . . ."

"I have stood and watched in awe," Wendourie said. "It can be peaceful as the billabong and then suddenly turbulent and angry, its voice more frightening than the bull-roarer. It would devour the biggest canoes."

Ooloo nodded. "True," he agreed. "None would dare risk their lives." He lifted his shoulders in a characteristic shrug. "Still, it is a pity Kuduna died before he told what he had seen."

As Ooloo watched Wendourie's black body merge and lose itself in the tangle of scrub, in the distant northeast Captain Madge of the ketch *Ulysses*, making its way from Sydney with a small party of colonists for the new settlement at Brisbane, was sitting in his cabin, a glass of grog in his hand, a Bible on his knee, and on the table before him the log in which he had lately written:

August 17, 1847: This day, the sea being calm with a light breeze, moored in a little cove very lovely to behold alongside a rock ledge providing a natural dock and giving us six fathoms no less. Being greatly enamored of the place and the morrow being her wedding anniversary, nothing would satisfy Mistress Turner but her husband should make an excursion ashore to gather branches of the golden blossoms growing abundantly in scrubland bordering a flat pasture. Facilities for disembarking being good and weather mild, Mr. Turner decided to land the light dray and our horse and go a little inland for to spy out the country and perhaps obtain game. Party returned safely aboard with no game and nothing to show for their pains but a load of blossoms which they pulled from the trees as the dray passed beneath.

August 18, 1847: The rain which fell during the night with some violence ceased early this morning and dawn brought a beautiful day, to be marred, unhappily, by a distressing incident. Mr. Turner, watching from the deck, observed movement in the near bushes ashore and suspecting savages, and first shouting as a warning, fired a shot to frighten them away. Sent two men ashore to investigate who returned with a poor naked heathen whom Mr. Turner had accidentally shot dead.

Feeling a little sad at heart and asking God's forgiveness for our part in this calamity, tide and breeze being favorable, sailed from this most lovely spot amid the laughter of the ladies and gentlemen and with Mr. Scott's little daughter sitting prettily in the stern, a garland of golden blossoms about her neck, singing to herself as she tore up an old newspaper and watched it drift away.

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PRIZE WINNER FROM THE PHILIPPINES: H. T. ALFON

We know little of H. T. Alfon, the author of "Fourth Rule For Murderers" — only what is revealed in the short note attached to the original manuscript and what is revealed by the story itself. A letter of inquiry sent by your Editor to the author either went astray in the mail, or failed to reach Mr. Alfon for some other reason, or perhaps, having received our letter, Mr. Alfon had his own good motives for remaining a man (or woman?) of mystery. The note accompanying the manuscript is brief and to the point, beginning with a salutation in the same breezy, semi-colloquial style you will find in the story itself: Dear Ed (short, obviously, for Editor); and the letter continues: "Your magazine finds many readers even as far as here, Manila — EQMM has grown known that fast, that far. I don't know if Filipinos are eligible for the contest — although I don't see why not!" You are dead right, Mr. Alfon — you don't see why not, and neither do we. The awarding of a Special Prize to Mr. Alfon's story speaks eloquently for our position in the matter of eligibility: everyone, male or female, young or old or middle-aged, unknown or well-known or medium-known, living anywhere in the entire world, is eligible to submit any number of stories to EQMM's annual contests — not only eligible, but we urge you, we plead with you, we cordially invite you to participate.

Mr. Alfon's story is strictly in the realistic school — indeed, we were forced by the taboos of publishing practice to blue-pencil some of the more realistic realisms in Mr. Alfon's manuscript. Mr. Alfon has without question devoured Dashiell Hammett, but while he is obviously influenced by the terseness and stylistic understatement of the hardboiled school, he is also enough of an individualist, as a writer, to put something all his own, something Alfonish, into his work . . . plus the curiously appealing use of American slang which the author probably picked up from GIs stationed in the Philippines.

Oh, we nearly forgot: Mr. Alfon enclosed a self-addressed envelope, but having no United States postage stamps, he affixed to the top right-hand corner of the envelope, with scotch tape, a silver coin — the first of its kind we've ever seen. In size it is halfway between a United States quarter and a United States half-dollar, and slightly thicker than the latter. One side shows the Philippine coat-of-arms, with UNITED STATES OF AMERICA *above and the date 1945 below; the other side shows a goddess*

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in a long, diaphanous dress (the new look?) either banging an anvil with a hammer or dropping something into something (we can't make it out clearly), but there's a smoking volcano in the background and the words FIFTY CENTAVOS *above and* FILIPINAS *below. In any event, the coin represents the spoils of contestry, and EQMM will keep it as a luckpiece — to insure bountiful submissions in the future from all Asia.*

FOURTH RULE FOR MURDERERS

by H. T. ALFON

LYING there in the dry gutter behind the logs her breasts look hardly big enough to have nursed two children. Her face is smooth and unlined, giving no hint of the uncertainties of a young widow. Down the sides of her half-opened lips a driblet of dark brown had coursed. But that did not mar her appearance.

Yep, she sure is pretty. Also, now, very dead.

Two neat holes with blackish powder-burn rings around them are on the slightly mussed white front of her dress. These .45 slugs make a neat hole coming in. On the back, of course, well, quite a chunk of flesh has been blown off.

But from the front, she is pretty. About as pretty a corpse as any I've seen in fifteen years on the Manila Police Force.

From her quivering-lipped escort we get what facts there are.

Her name was Emilia. Emilia Faras Bagby. She was the widow of a Lieutenant in the U. S. Armed Forces in the Far East who'd gone through Bataan and died of concentration-Camp O'Donnel disease (malaria, dysentery, and beriberi). She had two children by him, now five and three years of age. She'd come down to Manila from a north Luzon province to collect the death claim on her late husband. Pending action by the Veteran's Administration, she was taking courses in the Foreign Service School of a University. Here, he, Marcelino Yambao, Junior, had met her and they'd fallen into the habit of his escorting her home after night classes. As on this night.

They'd taken a "jeepney" from the school, got off at the corner of Aurora and Oroquieta, and were making their way to her home on 1415 Oroquieta where she lived with some province-mates.

Two men had come out of the murk in the unlighted street and had held them up with guns. One had grabbed Yambao's wrist watch, then slugged him on the nape of the neck with the gun.

Dazed, Yambao vaguely saw Emilia dragged off to a side. He, himself, freed from the attention of his as-

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sailant, had run behind some unsawed logs where, in the dark, he bumped his already woozy head. From here, he heard Emilia cry out: *Maawa ka sa akin, Junior!* (Have pity on me, Junior!) Then, he heard two shots coming so close together, they sounded like one.

He heard Emilia make a sort of cry, then he heard the sound of running feet on the hard-packed earth.

He tried to get help from the neighboring houses, but they had been hastily barred and no occupant would venture to answer his calls. So he had gone back to look for Emilia.

He found her like this:

Her books and her bag had fallen some distance from where she lay behind the logs. Her earrings had been ripped off her ear-lobes, tearing them from the holes, outward. Her neck still showed an angry red where a necklace had been snatched from. Her rings, a plain wedding gold-band and a diamond-crowned engagement one, were evidently too tight to be taken off in a hurry or were just overlooked. Her skirts had been bunched around her waist. Her stockings showed runs where someone had tried to claw them down. There were nail-scratches on the thigh above the garter indentations.

The light from our flashlights showed the earth too hard-packed to "take" footprints.

We did the usual motions. Check on Yambao's story starting with the "jeepney," but we couldn't find any driver who remembers Yambao and Emilia together. Yambao alone, yes. Emilia alone, yes. Yambao and Emilia, maybe. One driver said Yes but he can't identify Yambao. Another says Yes, but he claims to have let them out at a different corner.

Since a "jeepney" driver acts as his own conductor and since passengers pay by passing the money over the driver's shoulders and most of them get in and out through the door in the rear, we hadn't expected too much.

So we took Yambao's story as essentially true.

Next, we find out which of the neighbors had dared enough to look for the policeman supposed to be on that beat.

She turned out to be a Mrs. Calixta Reyes. She wanted to put in a full two pesos worth of additional comment on the morals of the young and the inadequacy of the police force and what was she paying taxes for and why were those congressmen getting back-pay when most of them served the Japs, etc., etc. On the affair at hand, two sentences could cover the matter: She heard a girl's cry for someone to pity her, then two shots. The men in her house (*Tchah!* in disgust) had hidden behind the women thinking it was an invasion by Hukbalahaps, but she was of stronger fiber and had she gone through the fighting in South Manila to be frightened by those *Tarantados* with guns? She had gone out to look

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for a policeman but that *Borot* was not to be found, having probably sought shelter at the sound of shooting.

(The cop's name is Domingo Sabado. Ten years on the Force and still pounding a beat! He had caught a suspicious-looking person skulking around earlier in the evening. There being no call-box in the vicinity — as is the case in several other vicinities — he had to hail a "jeepney" and haul his prisoner over to the station, himself. The fellow, Ricardo Torino, was later booked on a vagrancy charge for three months. At the time of the shooting Sabado was still on his way back to his beat.)

The rest of the neighbors emulate the "wise" post-war guerrillas: they come out after the shooting and are loud in their histories of personal valor. The more they say, the less clear the matter becomes and we have a heck of a time wading through the reams of testimony.

The thing that shines through all the murk of verbiage are the words Emilia cries out: "*Maawa ka sa akin, Junior!*" Yambao is a "Junior" too, so we ask him to explain. That cry of hers could be to him, asking him to pity her and not shoot her. Also the doctors had not found any bruise on the nape of his neck where he said he'd been hit. And how about that bruise on his face that looked like scratch-marks?

Marcelino Yambao, Junior, is the son of a professor at the University where he and Emilia are enrolled. From his professor father Marcelino got the cool brains that made up for his quivering lips.

Yes, the cry of Emilia's was to him. But it was a cry for help, and she had added words which the other hearers missed. In full, Emilia had cried: "*Maawa ka sa akin, Junior! Tulungan mo ako.*" (Have pity on me, Junior! Help me!)

As for the absence of a bruise on the nape of his neck — well, his doctor said that could be: that he could get hit there hard enough to be dazed and still not be bruised. Those marks like scratches on his face? Well, he'd told us about his bumping into something in the dark among the pile of lumber. So that's that, as far as Yambao is concerned.

We go to Emilia's room in 1415 Oroquieta to see if we can dig up anything else. Emilia's cousin turns out to be her landlady and from her we get permission to go through Emilia's things.

A pile of letters to her, in a drawer, proves more of a headache than a lead.

There are no less than four other "Juniors" corresponding in terms of intimacy with Emilia who doesn't seem to have taken her widowhood too hard.

One "Junior" is a college professor. Number two is a lawyer with a practice confined to helping widows collect for deceased service men. Number three is a doctor; the fellow certified to Emilia's husband's death as service-connected. The fourth is an officer in the Recovered Personnel Division in charge of death claims.

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That's what the police are for — routine-work like looking up all these other "Juniors."

We aren't any too credulous of Yambao's explanations about the "Junior" part of Emilia's cry. No one else confirms his "Help me" addition. So all that is still open as far as the police are concerned. Right now, we try the other irons in the fire.

In the next two weeks we question the "Juniors."

All the while the papers yap about the inefficiency of the police as a body and of the new political-appointee Chief. You can't blame the papers too much. The woman-groups in the City are on the editors' necks. The women write letters to editors and if these don't get published, the women get their husbands to cancel advertising space previously contracted for.

So the papers jump on the Chief and the Chief jumps on us in the detective force.

I've been through this before so many times in the past.

Look at my record: I entered the Force in 1932 as a rookie and I made the plainclothes squad in 1937. I've been in plainclothes since then except for the Jap Occupation when I took to the hills, only to find out my feet are better on pavement than on hills. Still, I'd kept out of the Force then and gone back only after Liberation, as soon as the Army released me. In all these years, before the War and now, there have been murders and the papers have had to yap under pressure from one group or another. Manila is that small a city.

Every time there is one of these things, they talk of police shake-ups and of the need for additional policemen on the Force. Then things quiet down and we're back to buying our own bullets for practice.

And guns! Back in the days before the War, in the Philippines, guns were used more for suicide than for homicide. Now, there are more loose guns floating around than there are men who know how to use them. Every bootblack playing *Hantak* on the sidewalk dreams of winning enough to buy a gun.

Knives, now. I'm used to them, but Filipinos are keeping up with the new things they have learned.

To go back . . .

We look up all the "Juniors" and run into a dead-end each time. Four times!

As our American sergeant used to say: "Ball four! Take a walk!"

So we walked. Literally. Backward into something we should have done before: question Emilia's cousin.

That pays off when we get from her the news that Emilia remarried an Antonio Valera, a Lieutenant in the Military Police Command. Secretly, so as not to hinder collection of the death-claim on her first husband. They had a falling-out over the many men Emilia went around with and they were now living apart.

We sent a message to Valera's address, asking him to drop in at the station. He had gone to the province

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just a week before; just after Emilia's funeral.

Antonio. His nickname could be "Tonio." Not too far from "Junior"!

So we sent out "Wanted for questioning" notices through the Military Police Command radio. We think we have things pretty well sewed up, but in police work it never pays to pat one's self on the back too soon. The papers splash the news about Valera's being wanted. To read them, one would think the case was docketed in court and all the police had to do was testify.

Then four hours after the papers are out, the MPC radio brings in the news that Valera has voluntarily presented himself to the MPs stationed in his province and has offered to motor back to the City that afternoon. He comes to Headquarters that evening and waives his right to counsel during the questioning.

His story is straight enough. We check and countercheck. Fool-proof. Yes, Emilia and he married, but they decided to call it quits, at least until she decides to give up going with other men.

But he hadn't seen her for almost a month before her death. Yes, he could; it turns out fortunately for him, account for his whereabouts during the night of the shooting. He was in camp, eight kilometers away.

An Army Major, a Captain, and two other Lieutenants swear to Valera's winning at poker until well into the morning after the night of the murder.

We have no time to sulk too long over the resultant yap in the papers about the dead-ends we end up in. Yambao's watch is identified and traced back through the buyer; to the colored American he bought it from; and finally to the original vendor, a fellow named Saturnino Agcaoili, who claims at first he'd bought it off an unidentified seller. When pressed on the description of the seller, and informed that the watch was Yambao's and could very well tie somebody in with the killing, Agcaoili changes his story: says he found the watch.

After a few hours questioning in the back room, Agcaoili admits he held up Yambao, naming a certain Romeo Carillo as his accomplice.

But he balks at admitting the killing, claims a hold-up is all Romeo and he are guilty of.

We send a hurry call for Romeo Carillo to be picked up at the address Agcaoili gives us.

The neighbors near the place say Romeo left the place two days after the shooting. Says he's going to Leyte, his home-province.

So it looks like we're on the right trail at last. Agcaoili says Romeo is from Tacloban, Leyte.

It's my case. So I leave for Tacloban after a delay of two days caused by an airlines workers' strike.

In Tacloban I get in touch with the local police and the Military Police unit in the town. Romeo is a notorious character in Tacloban and the authorities have had trouble with him

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before he left for Manila. He is supposed to have a local gang of some sort who follow him because of the glamor of his having "made good" in Manila.

We locate his house and with some MPs surround it.

There isn't any too much light. I call out for Romeo to come out with his hands up. He comes out of the doorway, with a .45 automatic bulking large in one hand. He starts to say something beginning with "I sur . . ." but a submachine gun in the hands of some jumpy MP cuts loose and chops his words short.

No use expressing regrets about the possibility of Romeo's surrendering and maybe making a confession. I pick up Romeo's .45 for ballistic tests back in Manila. I leave by plane next morning for Manila.

Back in Headquarters, I overrule objections to its being a waste of time and insist on tests being made on the automatic for comparison with the slugs from Emilia's body.

The slugs don't match.

Still that's not too bad. Romeo could have exchanged his .45 for any of the other thousands of .45s floating around.

Agcaoili still insists that a hold-up was all he took part in. No shooting or anything else. No amount of questioning shakes that story. Not even a promise to let him off with a lighter charge sways him.

Looks like he'll go on protesting his innocence until he is executed.

On the surface the case is finished, but I'm old-fashioned enough to have doubts and still sensitive enough to lose sleep over our maybe sending up the wrong man.

So I look over the notes on the case that night. Not that I'm any genius who can locate something the others have missed. This is my case. If anything is missed, I'm the one who missed it.

I let my mind play with all the other things that could have happened. I check the less wild ones for further check. In particular, I mull over one possibility that seems less and less wild the more I think of it. At eight, I laugh at the theory. At nine, it could be. At ten, I have to think it over. At eleven that night, I'm sure. At twelve, I'm positive. By then, it's too late to get a warrant. Anyway, I have to wait until the morning to check on Ricardo Torino, the vagrant whom the cop Sabado had taken earlier on the night of the shooting.

And to think that I had "him" under my thumb all this while! It is enough to make me kick myself! Well, at least, no one else thought of it first.

In the local jail I have Torino taken out to identify a picture and later to identify, at sight, the man in the picture. Yes, "he" had seen the man hanging around, as if waiting for someone. Torino admits having approached the man, been driven off with curses. He had seen the hold-up, been frightened by the two men doing the hold-up, had run away and

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been picked up by Sabado who had been unwilling to listen to any "fool story to alibi someone's actions" and who had peremptorily carted him, Torino, off to jail. Typically, Torino had sulked then and refused to help any policeman too dumb to listen.

Yambao kept his mouth shut to the end and refused to admit anything.

Probably one of those mystery magazine fans, he still believes in the Three Rules for Murderers — that a killer can get away with murder if (1) *he kills ruthlessly;* (2) *kills alone, without any accomplice;* and (3) *keeps his head.*

The way I see it, the drivers of the "jeepney" were right — the ones who'd seen Emilia and Yambao separately. Yambao arrived at the place, first. He had waited for Emilia, been approached by Torino, whom he drove off, been held up by Agcaoili and Carillo who were satisfied with his watch and who had not bothered to search him. One of the hold-uppers had probably hit him on the nape of the neck before fleeing. He had recovered enough to intercept Emilia when she came and had forced his intentions on her. Either repulsed or having succeeded and out of his fear that she would denounce him, he had probably threatened her with a gun. All right, grant that for him: he did not mean to kill her. But guns, especially automatics, are not things to be handled lightly by amateurs.

He had then ripped off her earrings and necklace to give color to the hold-up story — for which the real hold-up had given him the inspiration.

We do not recover the jewelry, but what we have is enough to make a case. Then, on a hunch, we test the gun of Yambao's father (yes, even professors dream of being tough guys) and our case is a ticket to the electric chair for Yambao, who had "borrowed" it without his father's knowledge. He must have cached it in the lumber yard and returned it later on, as soon as he got the chance.

Yambao still clings to that third rule; he keeps his head to the very end. We don't hang murderers or decapitate them; we electrocute them — if we can get that member of the Supreme Court to forget his prejudice against capital punishment. As it is, Yambao stands a chance of getting out after fifteen years of the usual alternative sentence of life imprisonment.

He can then try again. He'll probably add a Fourth Rule for Successful Murderers: (4) *be lucky.*

But I'll be retired by then.

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PRIZE WINNER FROM SOUTH AFRICA: ARTHUR WILLIAMS

We can think of no better way to introduce the prize-winning story from South Africa than to quote the author's accompanying letter in full. The manuscript came from an exotically named outpost-of-geography — Eerste Rivier, near Cape Town — and the author wrote: "As this is the first story I have tried to get published, I do not know whether it is necessary or not to state that, should this story be accepted, I would not like my real name divulged. Not that I am ashamed of the story or that I am not conscious of the pleasure I would have in seeing my name among the honored contributors to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, but in this particular case I think the effect of the story might be lost should my real name be given. Incidentally, the pen-name will save me from being troubled by people with no sense of humor. Also, I am writing a novel on South African life in which one of the characters is a detective story writer, Arthur Williams, and it would add to my attempt at realism if stories were actually published under that name.

"Another point I am ignorant of is this: whether or not it is necessary for me to give you authority to make any alterations in the story you consider desirable. For instance, I have noticed that you often have 'title trouble.' Since I live far away from New York and am at the moment traveling around South Africa 'copy' hunting, it would probably be a long time before any mail from you would eventually catch up with me. (It may interest you to know that the attached story was written in a Native Reserve just alongside the Kruger National Park Game Reserve in the Northern Transvaal.) I am therefore letting you know, now, that you may make any changes you think fit, in the title or in the story itself.

"As a matter of fact, I am not very satisfied with the title I finally decided on — 'Murder Requires No Exclamation Mark.' But the only alternatives I could think of — 'Murder No Crime' or 'No References Given' or 'A Merry Murderer I' — do not please me either."

[Editor's Note: We shared the author's dissatisfaction with the four titles he suggested. But isn't it strange how blind we become when we are too close to a problem? From the vantage point of our own objectivity we spotted an excellent title in the very first paragraph of the story — in fact, in the first four words of the manuscript.]

"Another alteration which you may find necessary [the author con-

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tinued] is to change our terms 'maize' and 'mealie meal' to the American 'cornmeal,' and our word 'lucerne' to your 'alfalfa.'"

Australia, the Philippines, Portugal, South Africa — what a heart-warming pleasure it is to learn how far and wide EQMM gets around, and how EQMM stimulates the writing of detective stories, especially by beginners, all over the world! Who said the detective story is dead or dying? Why, in a paraphrase of the immortal words of John Paul Jones, we've just begun to write!

BEING A MURDERER MYSELF

by ARTHUR WILLIAMS

BEING a murderer myself, I was very interested in the statement recently made by a well-known reviewer of murder stories that "the best and most stimulating detective stories being written today are those that stress the puzzle of 'why' at least co-equally with 'who' and 'how'."

It is gratifying to see, even if it is only in the field of fiction, that the character of a murderer is at last being considered worthy of more detailed analysis. In the past too much importance has been attached to discovering the identity of a murderer and the means of apprehending him. On the other hand, I do not consider wasted the time spent on the puzzle of "how," since after all, the method adopted is an indication of the type of man employing it; furthermore, it often decides whether the killer is to become famous, as a failure — or unknown, as a success.

I would also like to mention that we murderers do not *always* make a mistake. That fallacy has arisen because only those murderers who *have* made mistakes ever come to the notice of the police. On the whole, we are very efficient, and taking the number of known cases only, it is evident that we have got away with many murders, in spite of the very large organizations directed against us.

But the most common misconception held by most people is that a murderer is different from the ordinary man. Too often he is described in exaggerated terms such as "an insane monster" or "a cold-blooded brute." Such melodramatic ideas are far from the truth. Actually, a murderer is quite normal, merely possessing greater courage to act on the universal conviction that the true golden rule is "Every man for himself."

It is for this reason, therefore — to provide authentic data for the detective-story writer — that I have decided to make public my experience

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of murder. I have been fortunate in being so clever that I am able to relate this experience without fear of unpleasant consequences.

I felt no animosity towards Susan Braithwaite, personally, when I killed her, though some might consider that I had reason to hate her. I had been very fond of her once and would have married her if she had not been so stupid as to choose Stanley Braithwaite for a husband. Still, as I consider myself a civilized man of the world, I had felt that if she wanted to marry money-bags, that was her own funeral.

I suppose it was the feminine in her which had attracted me, that was in turn more attracted to the obvious maleness of Braithwaite — a great lout of a fellow, but with the right sort of brains to make his way in the world. He had inherited a little money, and being a city man he was able to make the best use of it. He had made a fair income by dealing on the Stock Exchange, not by the haphazard methods of a gambler, but with the unspectacular method of the investor. It was typical of him that during the record boom on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, brought about by the discovery of gold in the Orange Free State, he continued his phlegmatic way of taking a profit as soon as a deal showed any, in spite of the fever of optimism that raged on the Exchange. He was thus able to build up and consolidate a small fortune, and when the inevitable recession came, his funds were mostly liquid. Then, instead of being affected by the pervading depression, he quietly bought shares which had dropped to next to nothing and so almost doubled his already swollen fortune when the equally inevitable recovery took place. A most infuriating man!

When I introduced him to Susan, she became greatly attracted by his masterful manner and the success which it spelled. In fact, she was carried away to such an extent that she flew to Europe with him — thus terminating our engagement.

I had hoped never to see her again.

Eighteen months later, on answering a knock at the back door of my house, I found Susan on the step, suitcase in hand. When she had comfortably settled herself on the Chesterfield couch in my study, she told me her story. I was not surprised at what she revealed. I could well imagine that Braithwaite's self-assured dominant maleness, which she had preferred to my modest intellectual qualities, would develop into a complacent egoism, ruling with efficient tyranny. When she could bear his insensitiveness no longer, she had walked out on him and had come to me, for she felt that I would help her for old times' sake.

She did not notice, however, that I was not enthusiastic at the prospect of helping her. Actually, I was highly displeased. After she had jilted me, I had worked her out of my system, at the same time making extensive improvements on my poultry farm. I had made the whole farm self-support-

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ing, and with labor-saving devices and processes was able to run the whole place single-handed, for I liked fowls and preferred to do all the work among them myself.

But with Susan there it would have been difficult to continue in the same satisfying way. I knew I would have to entertain her, which meant that I would have had to shelve some of the less important, yet essential work. My routine would probably have got interfered with, and the three thousand chickens, which were at the most awkward age, might have caught cold or contracted some other ailment they are susceptible to.

Unfortunately, I could not think of any valid-sounding excuse for refusing to help her. Also, she had timed her arrival well: she would have had to stay the night at least, for there was no place in the village where she could have found accommodation and there were no trains back to Johannesburg till the following morning. I knew that once the ice had been broken by letting her stay the night, it would have been even more difficult to send her away the next day. After all, I had once been very fond of her and during the delirium of that time I had told her that no matter what ultimately happened between us, if she was ever in trouble she was to count on my help; and as I pride myself on being a man of my word, I could not bear to think of her telling our common friends that in an emergency I proved to be a broken reed.

All this passed through my mind while she chattered away about the cruel things her husband had done to her; but under the pretense of listening I followed the trend of my own thoughts till I became annoyed at the calm way she took my sympathy for granted. From the bits of her conversation I did listen to, I guessed in what manner she wished me to help her, and my annoyance mounted.

I saw my little bit of money being spent on lawyers; my comfortable and satisfying life being disturbed; my future peace being threatened by complicated emotions; in short, the whole of my nicely settled life being completely upset. I became so enraged that I thought, "Really, I could wring her neck!"

The actual strangling was more difficult than one would have thought. But the inability to face her, which had led me to go round the back of the couch to get my hands round her throat, turned out to be an advantage. For by crouching behind the back of the couch I was able to press her neck and head firmly against it, and so, by hanging on like grim death, avoid my hands becoming dislodged by her violent kicking, hitting, and threshing for air. Also, when she went limp, I was in a comfortable enough position not to need to relax till I was sure she was dead.

Her face — dark blue with grotesquely protruding tongue — was rather shocking when contrasted with the pretty animated expression it had had a few minutes before; and her once glossy hair seemed to have lost

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its blue tints and had become a lifeless-looking black. Otherwise, the sight of Susan's body did not affect me much.

After making sure that Susan was dead, I pushed her tongue back into her mouth and proceeded to dispose of the body in the manner I had been stimulated to devise when reading of the difficulties other murderers had experienced in this respect. I started the process that night, for though there was no urgency, as it would be days or even weeks before there would be any serious inquiry as to Susan's whereabouts, I was keen on putting my idea to the test. The following morning I was up early as usual and busy at my farm routine.

One afternoon, about three weeks later, Sergeant Theron of the local police turned up at my place and wanted to know if I knew anything about a Mrs. Braithwaite.

Sergeant John Theron on duty was a different man from the off-duty Johnny Theron who occasionally, when suitably warmed, entertained us in the backyard of Wiggins' pub by giving a demonstration of Wild West six-shooting. He was a crack shot and crouching slightly, he would fire two guns from the hip with amazing accuracy, at the same time looking from side to side with melodramatic belligerency; then after each salvo he would spit on the muzzles of the revolvers to "cool" them, giving a thigh-slappingly funny impression of a cowboy hero surrounded by dastardly villains.

But Sergeant John Theron of the South African Police was an alert and intelligent policeman who took his work seriously, and I knew by the way his question was worded that he was sure I *did* know something about Mrs. Braithwaite.

I guessed that she had been reported missing and had been traced to my farm. I decided, therefore, to take Theron into my confidence. I told him briefly all about my association with Susan in the past, winding up by telling him that she had been to see me one evening about three weeks before, but that she had left again the same night.

He naturally wanted further particulars and also wanted to know why I had not come forward and reported to the police that I had seen her at a time later than that which the newspaper appeal had stated was the last time she had been seen. I explained that I never read newspapers, but even if I had read the appeal for information, I would not have reported her visit as she had been running away from her husband.

I went on to tell him that she had wanted me to help her, but that I had refused; that we had quarreled till she had finally got into such a rage that she had walked out of the house leaving her hat, gloves, and suitcase behind. In reply to his questions I said that I did now know where she had gone, or how she intended to manage without her suitcase, or whether she had had a handbag with her or not.

After exhausting the subject of

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Susan's visit, Theron asked to see her suitcase. I gave it to him. He found it unlocked and opened it. On top was a brown handbag, which on being turned out was found to contain some money, a pair of earrings, a pearl necklace, a diamond ring, the usual feminine requirements, and a few loose keys, one of which fitted the suitcase. After carefully examining the rest of the suitcase's contents, Theron then asked me what Mrs. Braithwaite had been wearing that night.

That question had come sooner than I had expected, but I gave him the previously thought-out answer which was a genuine-sounding yet worthlessly vague description of the clothes I had carefully packed, together with the handbag, in the suitcase three weeks before. I had opened the case with one of the keys I had found in the handbag. I had had to leave the suitcase unlocked as I did not want the problem of disposing of the key. Incidentally, I had done the packing of the clothes, shoes, etc., while wearing gloves. I had no intention of leaving fingerprints inside the case and so making the traditional mistake.

Theron listened closely to the description, then pulled out the one dress in the suitcase which had obviously been worn, and asked me if that was the dress Mrs. Braithwaite had worn that evening. Of course, I replied that it was not, but I knew that if that dress had already been described by anyone who had seen Susan going to my farm, that description would be more or less the same as the one I had given.

After asking a few more unimportant questions, Sergeant Theron left, taking the suitcase, and the hat and gloves with him.

The police did not visit me again for a few days. I went to the village for a drink on the evening of the week that Johnny Theron usually spent at the pub, but he did not put in an appearance that night.

But I knew that it would only be a matter of time before I saw him again, for Susan's trail definitely ended at my place, and the police would concentrate there until they had reason to look elsewhere. When Theron eventually came again, about a week later, he was accompanied by Constable Barry, a prematurely bald young man who had wooed and won the village belle, Reneé Otto, by so maneuvering his courting that she never saw him without his helmet on — so the story went in the village, anyway. In charge of both Theron and Barry, however, was a man from the C.I.D. Headquarters in Johannesburg. This time the only words Sergeant Theron spoke throughout the morning were:

"Mr. Williams, this is Inspector Ben Liebenberg."

I acknowledged the introduction and asked the Inspector what I could do for him. He was a tall, handsome man, more like an actor than a detective. Afterwards I learned that he was a very good mixer — of drinks. His hobby was inventing new recipes for

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cocktails and other mixed drinks. I was told this, and about his variation of a Green Mamba, which is as deadly as the snake, by Theron later, when he was able to have a drink with me again.

Inspector Liebenberg professed himself sorry to trouble me, but would I mind if he had a look around? Mrs. Braithwaite had definitely been seen coming to my place, and had equally definitely not been seen anywhere else; so he would like to satisfy himself that she was not hiding somewhere on my farm.

I assured him that I understood and that it would be a pleasure to show him over the farm.

As we examined the homestead, I explained to them that I liked to be independent of any outside assistance, so had made my house and farm as self-contained as possible. I showed them the coal bin in the kitchen, built like a small room and filled at the top from the outside, having a little square outlet flush with the floor, next to the coal-burning stove. Below the kitchen there was a concrete underground tank for storing rain water. It had a handpump attached, and pipes were laid from it to the bathroom. The rest of my domestic water supply came from a large gravity tank on the roof, filled by a windpump from a borehole.

I started the tour outside by taking them to the three hundred feet long, subdivided, intensive-type, poultry house where, judging by the sound, the thousands of Leghorn hens were riveting their eggs together. I showed the policemen the incubator room and the brooder house, which I also used for experimental batches of chickens or fowls.

I then took them to the large corrugated-iron barn which housed my machinery — a tractor, a threshing machine, a hammermill, and various smaller machines such as lucerne cutters, etc.; also my general farm equipment such as ploughs, harrows, steam drying tank, planters, cultivators, etc., and my stocks of food. For round the sides of the barn were rows of large storage tanks, variously containing whole and crushed maize, maizemeal, meat meal, peanut meal, bone meal, lucerne meal, and the various other poultry and animal feed requirements I used for making up the different balanced rations.

I could see their eyes measuring the tanks, and the jotting down of copious mental notes.

In the open air again, I pointed out my cultivated lands — the lucerne fields green, owing to the water from the dam, but the maize and other lands a yellowy brown. In the distance we could just make out the few cows, oxen, and horses grazing on the uncultivated part of my farm.

When they had seen the whole farm, Inspector Liebenberg thanked me for my trouble and departed — rather depressed, I thought. I would like to have suggested that perhaps twenty maids with twenty mops . . . but decided that it was unwise to trade on my security too much.

A week passed without event,

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though I began to get irritated by being under continuous surveillance. Even Constable Barry had altered his beat so that he was able to pass my gate which, though a fair distance from the homestead, enabled him to have a clear view across the lawns to the house and garage.

I decided to make a move and bring matters to a climax. My best plan, of course, was to make Crippen's mistake, and run away.

I therefore made preparations, and early one morning I departed in my car at high speed. I drove fast for about five miles, then abruptly slowed down, headed the car into the veld and hid it as much as possible in a bushy bit, well away from the road.

I walked the rest of the way to the underground caves not far from the famous Blyvooruitzicht gold mine. These caves, though extensive, are not beautiful and do not attract many visitors. I had decided that the police would have already searched them thoroughly, so the chances were that I would be undisturbed. I had brought a Coleman lamp, a camp Primus, and ample provisions, and soon settled comfortably in one of the smaller caverns.

I knew the fowls on the farm would be all right for a few days, as their food troughs held enough for about three days, and the water troughs with their ball valves would remain full. The eggs would accumulate in the batteries of nests and ultimately make a mess, but one cannot have murder without breaking eggs. The other animals would not starve and there was plenty of water lying about the place. The chickens were then old enough to do without artificial heat for warmth, only requiring a small economical glow from the lamps to collect them in groups at night.

So, with my mind at peace, I was able to relax and enjoy the two detective books which I had brought with me. The stories were very good, though I noticed, with satisfaction, that the various detectives required considerable assistance from their authors.

On the morning of the third day I imagined that things should be about ripe for me to put in an appearance again.

As luck would have it, it was Sergeant Theron who met me first when I stepped out of the car in front of my house. The human face is not designed to express amazement, excitement, satisfaction, curiosity, wonder, relief, official reserve, friendliness, and regret all at once, but Theron's did its best.

When he recovered he demanded to know where I had been. I told him that I had gone to the caves to see if Mrs. Braithwaite had not perhaps gone there and got lost and died there, and that I had become lost myself and had found my way out only that morning. He snapped his fingers in exasperation and I guessed that he had spread his net far and wide, but had not thought of looking for me so close at hand.

While he was thinking what he

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ought to do next, I looked around to get details of the impression of an upturned ant heap which I had received when I drove up.

I had expected to see signs of activity but nothing like what I saw then. Evidently the police had decided to use more than twenty maids, for the place was in a turmoil.

There were men everywhere — on the roof of the house, round the house, half under the house; there were men walking about with heads bent examining the ground, men digging at various places, men around the dam, round the borehole, in the fields, and on the lands. I could not see into the barn, but it must have been full of men, for outside the main double doors a collection of agricultural hardware was scattered like the throwback of a burrowing terrier.

But the most joyous sight was the long hen-house. The hens had, very unwisely, all been chased outside so that the concrete floor inside could be examined. To lay the floor bare a six-inch layer of manured straw had first to be removed. This considerable task had already been mostly achieved, for the straw lay in large mounds outside, in front of the entrance doors.

Along the outside of the poultry house there were men trying to uncover the foundations, for whoever was in charge of the searching meant to leave no stone unturned. I write "trying" advisedly, for the diggers were being considerably hampered by the thousands of hens who had no place to go, but who were trying, with hen-like persistence, to go back where they belonged. Hens are very conservative — besides, they had eggs to lay. There was a precarious and continually changing line of them along the narrow ledge between the mesh wire front of the house and the edge of the low front wall on which the wire front rested. And this was one of the walls the foundations of which the men were hoping to examine.

They were almost smothered in hens. When it wasn't hens, it was dust and dirt. A Leghorn is a very highly strung bird, and jumpy at the best of times. With Leghorns you have to keep up a continual chatter, or be forever silent. While I was watching, one of the men digging had to reply to a call from a distant policeman. His sudden shouted answer resulted in the thousands of hens leaping into the air as one bird, with, literally, a roaring of wings. The men became lost to view in a cloud consisting of a mixture of fine particles of manure, straw, earth, spilled food, and down.

I was not able to see more, for by then Theron had decided that I had better come along with him to the police station to answer some questions. At the station I was left in charge of Constable Hurndal, who received my nod of recognition rigidly. After a short delay Theron started questioning me, trying hard to give the impression that he did not attach much importance to my answers.

I was halfway through my third

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cigarette when a constable burst into the room and shouted, "We've found the body!"

I jumped up, and exclaimed, "How exciting! Where?" — a remark thoroughly in bad taste considering that I had known Mrs. Braithwaite well, but one that could not be interpreted as coming from a guilty and apprehensive mind. I turned to Theron who had been watching me closely and saw doubt in his eyes.

Not that it mattered whether I betrayed guilt or not. I was perfectly safe and could never give myself away no matter what trick they tried. But if I had shown any signs of a guilty conscience, Theron would have known definitely that I was a murderer. This I wanted to avoid, or there would not have been much future pleasure in visiting the pub. I did not mind his official suspicion, but his private certainty would have been different.

Theron continued the farce and also asked the constable where the body had been found. The latter went on, with less enthusiasm, to describe vaguely some spot in the uncultivated land. They both looked at me with a last hope that I might indicate they were getting warm. I said, "Fancy, I wouldn't have thought that was a good place to bury a body. This means that she was murdered, doesn't it?"

Of course they never found Susan's body on my farm, or anywhere else. Nor any trace of it. They examined the stove for any signs of human ash, they swept the chimney for the same purpose. They dug up the drains to see if I had possibly dissolved the body in a bath of chemicals. In short, they looked everywhere and tried every box of tricks possessed by the Johannesburg C.I.D. All to no avail.

Finally, they had to give up, baffled, and no matter how much they suspected that Susan had been murdered, they had no proof. In spite of a most thorough search of my farm, no body was found, and this fact plus no obvious motive on my part resulted in the cloud of suspicion hanging over my head gradually becoming dispersed.

That Christmas, to show that there was no ill feeling, I sent Sergeant Theron a brace of cockerels.

The months passed in uninterrupted peace. My content was marred only by the news that Sergeant Theron was leaving to join the Rhodesian Police.

We gave him a fine farewell party, Bill Wiggins providing the drinks, while I contributed the poultry. Poor Johnny was not able to give us a last demonstration of six-shooting that night, for when we went out into the yard the fresh air had a bad effect on him, and it took him all his time to stay relatively upright, hanging on to the swaying washing lines.

The building of a new brooder house began to occupy all my thoughts. But doing it by myself took all my time, with the result that I could not keep my house clean and tidy. So after much indecision, I

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engaged a housekeeper — a blonde, tall, but giving the impression of childlike plumpness. She is most efficient, yet her warm smile suggests that she could be very kind and affectionate.

It is because she runs the house so well that I now have time in the evening to write this record of my experience with homicide.

I am looking forward to having an interesting time should I get this published. I am particularly curious about Theron's reaction should he read this and so learn the make-up and constitution of those plump chickens he so enjoyed.

I suppose he will be disgusted, though he need not be. After all, how was he to know that those chickens had been feeding on the body of Susan Braithwaite?

I do not mean by crudely pecking at it. On the contrary, the fowls ate Susan in well-balanced rations. Every bit of her body, at different times naturally, had been through the hammermill, to be ground into fine bone meal and meat meal. A separate process made blood meal.

These processes entailed no difficulty as I had learned how to do it from an article in the *Farmers' Magazine*, and had been doing it with animal carcases long before. And as far as the hammermill process is concerned, human bodies, not requiring to be skinned and having smaller bones, are much easier to manage.

I had only to take extra care that every single piece of the body was powdered. The teeth I had to put through the milling process a couple of times till they became indistinguishable from the rest of the bone meal. The hair I burned on the head, making a sort of charcoal.

After I had processed the body, I wiped everything that it had touched with handfuls of green lucerne, which in turn was ground fine. Animal carcases were then put through the mill, followed by heaps of lucerne and bags of maize, so that all trace of human cells were completely removed from the machine.

The meat meal, bone meal, and blood meal were made into a ration with other foodstuffs and was fed to my experimental batch of chicks — and what fine chickens they grew into, as Theron can testify. As a matter of fact, I have established quite a reputation for fine pullets and cockerels, and other poultry farmers have pestered me for the recipe of my balanced ration.

This will surely be brought to the attention of Inspector Liebenberg, who now, knowing where to look, may try to find some proof that there was once a human body on my farm. But I am certain he will not succeed. It would be no use slaughtering fowls wholesale, in an attempt to find the ones that have partaken of Susan — with the object of testing them for any traces of human cells in their make-up. I have seen to it that every fowl that shared that human ration has itself been consumed by other humans.

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As people do not eat the bones of fowls, I made a point of selling, or giving, the dressed fowls only on condition that I was allowed to collect the bones afterwards. My explanation of this was that I was short of bone meal. These bones then went through the mill with other bones. A nice example of *ad infinitum*. Also, there are a large number of anonymous people who, in a remoter degree, took part in this deplorable cannibalism. I mean those who ate the eggs that were laid by the hens.

Then Inspector Liebenberg will no doubt think of the manure. I wouldn't bother if I were he. Every bit of it has been spread over my uncultivated land and thoroughly ploughed in. Alas for the Inspector, the plucked feathers, heads, legs, feet, and innards of the dressed fowls sold or given away, after being burned or steam dried, also did not escape a hammering from the relentless mill.

I hope the good Inspector is not driven to trying to make this story of mine have the value of a legal confession. It would be a great pity if an ardent student of detective fiction, desirous of seeing a story of his own published, should be arrested because he invented a feasible explanation to account for the disappearance of a woman he happened to know.

I suppose I must also expect a certain amount of unpleasantness if this is read in our village. Some narrow-minded people will no doubt look upon me with horror and others will fear me. Since the main result of such attitudes will be that I shall no longer be pestered by casual callers, I shall be only too pleased.

A new development has occurred. My housekeeper, Ann Lissen, may turn out to be a disappointment after all. She is evidently falling, or has already fallen, in love with me and is becoming tiresome. Her solicitude on my behalf is overwhelming and I now seem to have no privacy left, for she is always fussing about doing things to add to my comfort.

I would not like to hurt her feelings by telling her to stop doing what she does out of the kindness of her heart. And as she has no technical qualifications, it would be a shame to send her away to battle for a job again.

I have suggested to her that she should go out more, especially in the evenings, but she said it was dull going about alone. She has no friends, or even relations.

Poor thing! She has no one to miss her, and I am most eager to rear especially good stock next season, fed with rich and well-balanced rations. The President of the National Poultry Society has expressed a desire to see my farm and the fine pullets and cockerels for which I am now so justly famous.

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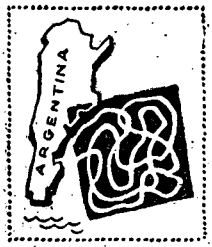
PRIZE WINNER FROM ARGENTINA: JORGE LUIS BORGES



We have long believed that Anthony Boucher possesses the three major qualifications of a topnotch translator: he is himself a creative writer; he is unquestionably a creative critic; and last but not least, he has that type of rabid enthusiasm which can only be described as passionate. As a result, Mr. Boucher's translations of foreign detective stories project an undeniable authenticity. The author's original style, always so difficult to capture in alien words, comes through: we get the substance of the plot and the shadow of the mood and characterization . . . It was Mr. Boucher who conceived the idea of translating "The Garden of Forking Paths" and persuading the author to submit the story to EQMM's Third Annual Contest. We are grateful for Mr. Boucher's double services as a mystery-midwife — otherwise none of us would have had the pleasure of reading what Mr. Boucher considers "a small classic." In its own rather peculiar way, "The Garden of Forking Paths" is just that — a miniature masterpiece. The story is based on a tremendous, a colossal coincidence. Indeed, as you will discover, the coincidence is so staggering that it is not merely the means of resolving a story — it is *the story. And the rich "window dressing" which surrounds the basic idea adds immeasurably to the author's bravado of conception.*

Señor Borges is an important Argentinian literary figure — poet, critic, essayist, and anthologist. In all his work, especially in his fiction, the author employs the motif of a labyrinth — it is a persistent monomania, recurring in subtly changing variations, like (Mr. Boucher reminds us) the crutches in the paintings of Salvador Dali. In "The Garden of Forking Paths," Señor Borges's labyrinthine theme reaches its fullest expression.

Señor Borges's work reveals another persistent quirk: he has an inordinate fondness for mock scholarship. He will, for example, invent a completely apocryphal author or literary school and then write a long and delightfully learned dissertation on the esoteric importance of his imaginary figure or movement; but the fantasy and satire he weaves into his critical opinions are not always without factual significance. In one of his most brilliant essays, titled "An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain," there is the following remarkable paragraph:

"I have said that his first novel is a detective story, THE GOD OF THE LABYRINTH; *I may add that its publisher placed the book on sale in the last days of November 1933. In the first week of December the agreeable*

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and arduous involutions of Ellery Queen's THE SIAMESE TWIN MYSTERY *preoccupied New York and London; I prefer to attribute to this disastrous coincidence the total failure of our friend's novel. Also (I wish to be completely sincere) to its insufficiency of technique and to the empty and frigid pomp of certain descriptions of the sea. After seven years it is impossible for me to recall the details of the plot; but here is its plan, insofar as my memory impoverishes it (and perhaps purifies it). There is an indecipherable murder in the opening pages, a slow discussion of the crime in the middle ones, and a solution in the last pages. Once the riddle has been solved, there is one long retrospective paragraph which contains this sentence: 'Everyone believed that the two chess players had met by chance.' This sentence gives one to understand that the solution is in error. The uneasy reader returns to earlier chapters and now finds* another *solution, which is the true one. The reader of this singular book proves himself in the final analysis to be more perspicacious than the detective."*

Now you know what to expect!

THE GARDEN OF FORKING PATHS

by JORGE LUIS BORGES

(translated by Anthony Boucher)

ON PAGE 252 of Liddell Hart's *History of the World War* you may read that an offensive of thirteen British divisions supported by 1400 pieces of artillery, planned against the Serre-Montauban line for July 24, 1916, was postponed until the morning of the 29th.

The torrential rains, Captain Liddell Hart adds in a note, were responsible for this delay, an insignificant one in any case.

The following statement — dictated, reread, and signed by Dr. Yu Tsun, former professor of English in the *Hochschule* at Tsingtao, casts an unsuspected light over the entire affair.

The first two pages of the statement are missing.

. . . and I hung up the receiver. As soon as I had done so, I recognized the voice which had answered in German. It was that of Captain Richard Madden. The presence of Madden in Viktor Runeberg's flat meant the end of our projects and — though this seemed, or should have seemed, of secondary importance to me — likewise the end of our lives. It meant that Runeberg had been

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arrested, or murdered.* Before that day's sun should set, I would incur the same fate.

Madden was relentless. Or rather, circumstances compelled him to be relentless. An Irishman in the English service, a man accused of apathy and perhaps of treason, could hardly fail to seize gratefully upon this miraculous chance to uncover, capture, and possibly kill two agents of the German Reich.

I went up to my room. Absurdly I locked the door and threw myself down on the narrow iron cot. Through the window I saw the roofs I had always seen and the clouded sun of six o'clock. It seemed incredible that this day, so like all others, should be the day of my inevitable death. No premonitions, no symbols . . . My father was long dead, it was long ago that I was a child in the symmetrical garden of Hai Feng; but was I to die — and now? Then I reflected that all things happen to a man in the precise instant of now. Centuries pile upon centuries and only in the now can things happen; men innumerable fill the sea, the earth, the air, and all that really happens happens to me . . .

The almost intolerable memory of Madden's horse-like face cut short these wanderings. In the midst of my hatred and terror (the terror no longer signifies, now that I have made a fool of Richard Madden, now that my throat longs for the noose), I remembered that this tumultuous and doubtless happy warrior had no suspicion that I possessed the Secret — the name of the precise location of the new British artillery station on the Ancre. A bird streaked across the gray sky and blindly I translated it into an airplane and this airplane into many that streaked through the French sky and annihilated the artillery station with vertical bombs. If my mouth, before a bullet destroyed it, could cry the name of that location so loudly that it might be heard in Germany . . . My human voice was weak. How could it reach the ear of the Chief? The ear of the sickly, hateful man who knew nothing of Runeberg and me save that we were in Staffordshire and that he vainly waited for word from us, sitting in his arid office in Berlin, endlessly nosing through newspapers . . .

I said aloud, "I must flee." I arose soundlessly, in a useless perfection of silence, as though Madden were already on my trail. Something — perhaps merely the vanity of proving my helplessness — made me look through my pockets. I found what I knew I would find: the American watch, the nickel chain with the square charm, the key ring with the useless and compromising keys to Runeberg's flat, the wallet, a letter which I decided to destroy at once (and did not destroy), a cigar, two shillings and a few coppers, the red-and-blue pen-

* An hypothesis at once repulsive and ridiculous. The Prussian spy Hans Rabener, *alias* Viktor Runeberg, used his automatic to attack Captain Richard Madden, who carried a warrant for his arrest. In self-defense Madden was obliged to inflict the wounds which resulted in the spy's death. — *Editor's Note.*

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cil, the handkerchief, the revolver with one bullet. Absurdly I weighed it in my hand to give me courage. Vaguely I thought that a pistol shot could be heard over a long distance. In ten minutes my plan was complete. The telephone directory gave me the name of the only individual capable of transmitting my message; he lived in the suburb of Fenton, less than half an hour away by train.

I am a cowardly man. Now I can say it, now that I have carried out a plan the peril of which none can deny. I know the terror of that plan. I did not do it for Germany; I care nothing for a barbarous country which imposed upon me the humiliation of being a spy. Besides I know of one Englishman — an unassuming man — who to me ranks no whit below Goethe. I talked with him for not over an hour, but during that hour he was Goethe . . . I did this thing because I felt that the Chief held in scorn those of my race, the innumerable ancestors who flow together in me. I wished to prove to him that a man with yellow skin could save his armies. Moreover, I wanted to escape Captain Madden. At any moment his hands and his voice would pound against my door. I dressed silently, bade myself farewell in my mirror, and left the house.

It was a short distance to the station, but I thought it wiser to take a cab. I argued that I ran less risk of being recognized; actually it was because in the deserted street I felt visible and infinitely vulnerable. I remember that I told the driver to stop a little before the main entrance. With difficulty I forced myself to get out casually, slowly; I was going to the village of Ashgrove but I bought a ticket for a station farther along the line. The train would leave in a very few minutes, at 8:50. I hurried; the next train was not until 9:30. There was almost no one on the platform. I looked over the coaches; I remember a few working men, a woman in mourning, a young man absorbed in the *Annals* of Tacitus, a wounded and happy soldier. At last the train pulled out. A man pursued it vainly to the edge of the platform. I recognized Captain Richard Madden. Shattered, trembling, I shrank into the opposite corner of the compartment, away from the terrifying window.

I passed from this shattered state to an almost abject contentment. I told myself that the duel had begun and that I had won the first encounter by thus frustrating — even if for only forty minutes, even if by a caprice of fate — the attack of my adversary. I argued that this least of victories foreshadowed the total victory. I argued that it was not so small a triumph, since but for this precious difference presented to me by the timetable I should now be imprisoned or dead. I argued (no less sophistically) that my cowardly contentment proved me a man capable of carrying out the adventure successfully. From this weakness I drew forces that were not to desert me.

I foresee that man will give himself

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over with each day to more atrocious enterprises; soon there will be only warriors and bandits. To them I leave this counsel: *He who undertakes an atrocious enterprise must imagine that he has already accomplished it, must impose upon himself a future no less irrevocable than the past.* That was my course, while my eyes (the eyes of a man already dead) noted the liquidity of that day, which was perhaps the last, and the diffusion of the night.

The train ran smoothly through rows of ash trees. It stopped almost in the open country. No one called the name of the station. "Ashgrove?" I asked some children on the platform. "Ashgrove," they replied. I got off.

A lamp lit up the platform, but the children's faces remained in the zone of shadow. One boy asked me, "Are you going to Dr. Stephen Corbie's?" Without waiting for my answer another said, "The house is a long way off, but you won't get lost if you take the road to the left and turn to the left at every crossroads." I tossed them a coin (my last), went down a few stone steps, and entered the lonely road. Slowly I followed it. It was of unpaved earth; the branches mingled overhead, the low circular moon seemed to accompany me.

For one instant I thought that Captain Madden had in some manner realized my desperate intention. I soon understood that that was impossible. The advice always to turn to the left reminded me that such was the standard procedure for reaching the centre of certain mazes. I have some knowledge of mazes; not for nothing am I the descendant of that Ts'ui Pên who was governor of Yunnan but renounced temporal power to write a novel which was to be yet more all-embracing than the Hung Lu Meng and to construct a maze in which no man might find his way. Thirteen years he devoted to these ill-assorted labors, but the hand of a stranger murdered him and the novel made no sense and no man found the maze.

Beneath English trees I meditated on this lost maze: I imagined it inviolate and perfect on the secret summit of some mountain; I imagined it erased by rice fields or sunk beneath water; I imagined it infinite, no longer constructed of octagonal kiosks and twisting paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms . . . I thought of a maze of mazes, a labyrinth of labyrinths, one sinuous waxing labyrinth that should include the past and the future and in some manner involve the stars.

Absorbed in these illusory images, I forgot the fate which pursued me. I felt myself, for a certain space of time, the abstract perceiver of the world. The limpid living countryside, the moon, the dying body of the evening worked upon me, and the slope of the road eliminated any possibility of weariness. The evening was intimate and infinite. The road descended and forked among the dimmed meadows. A shrill syllabic music drew near and faded in the shifting wind, swaddled in leaves and distance. I thought that

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a man may be the enemy of other men, of other moments of other men, but not of a country: not of fireflies, words, gardens, watercourses, sunsets.

Thus I arrived before a tall and rusty gate. Through its grille I made out a grove of poplars and a small house. I understood suddenly two things, the first trivial, the second all but incredible: the music came from the house and the music was Chinese. This was why I had accepted it so fully and with so little curiosity. I do not recall whether there was a bell or whether I knocked. The music continued to sparkle.

But from the depth of the little house a lantern drew near, a lantern which sent out its rays to ring the trunks of the poplars, a paper lantern which had the shape of a drum and the color of the moon. A tall man bore it. I could not see his face; the light blinded me. He opened the gate and said slowly in my own language, "I observe that the pious Hsi P'êng has undertaken to correct my solitude. You wish no doubt to see the garden?"

I recognized the name of one of our consuls. Disconcerted, I repeated, "The garden?"

"The garden of forking paths."

Something stirred in my memory. With unaccountable certainty, I said, "The garden of my ancestor Ts'ui Pên."

"Your ancestor? Your illustrious ancestor? Come in."

The damp path zigzagged like those I knew in childhood. We entered a library of Eastern and Western books. I recognized, bound in yellow silk, certain manuscript volumes of that Lost Encyclopedia edited by the Third Emperor of the Luminous Dynasty but never printed. The gramophone record revolved near a bronze phoenix. I remember too a porcelain jar of the Rose Family and another, many centuries older, of that blue which our craftsmen copied from the Persian potters.

Stephen Corbie was watching me with a smile. He was, as I said, very tall, sharp-featured, gray-eyed, gray-bearded. There was something of a priest about him, and also something of a sailor. Later he told me that he had been a missionary in Tientsin "before I sought to become a Sinologue."

We seated ourselves, I on a long low divan, he with his back to the window and to the tall round clock. I calculated that I had an hour before the arrival of my pursuer, Captain Madden. My irrevocable resolve could wait.

"The fate of your ancestor Ts'ui Pên," said Stephen Corbie, "was astonishing. He was governor of his native province, learned in astronomy, in astrology, and in the unwearying exegesis of the canonical books, a master of chess, a famous poet and calligrapher — and all this he abandoned to compose a book and a maze. He renounced the pleasures alike of tyranny and of justice, of his well-populated couch, of banquets and even of learning; and for thirteen years he shut himself up in the

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Pavilion of Limpid Solitude. On his death his heirs found nothing save chaotic manuscripts. His family, as you are perhaps aware, wished to have these burned; but his executor — a Taoist or Buddhist monk — insisted on their publication."

"We of the race of Ts'ui Pên," I replied, "continue to curse that monk. The publication was an absurd enterprise. The book is a shapeless accumulation of contradictory drafts. I have examined it somewhat: in Chapter Three the hero dies, in Chapter Four he is alive. As for Ts'ui Pên's other undertaking, the maze . . ."

"Here is the maze," he said, indicating a tall, lacquered desk.

"A marble maze!" I exclaimed. "A labyrinth in miniature . . ."

"A labyrinth of symbols," he corrected me. "An invisible labyrinth in time. It has fallen to my lot, English barbarian that I am, to unveil this diaphanous mystery. After more than a hundred years the details are lost irrevocably; but one may conjecture the course of events. Upon one occasion Ts'ui Pên announced: 'I am retiring to write a book.' Upon another: 'I am retiring to construct a maze.' Everyone thought of two undertakings; no one imagined that the book and the maze were one. The Pavilion of Limpid Solitude stood, let us say, in the centre of a rather intricate garden; this fact may have suggested a physical labyrinth. Ts'ui Pên died. In all the widespread lands that were his no man could find the maze. The chaos of the novel suggested to me that book *itself* was the maze. Two circumstances gave me the correct solution to the problem. One: the curious legend that Ts'ui Pên had proposed to construct a labyrinth strictly infinite in its extension. The other: a fragment of a letter upon which I chanced."

Corbie rose. For a moment he turned his back to me and opened a drawer in the desk of black and gold lacquer. He returned with a sheet of once-crimson paper. Now it was pink and fragile and creased. Ts'ui Pên had been justly celebrated for his calligraphy. With excitement, without comprehension, I read the words which a man of my blood had traced with his minute brush: *I leave to the various futures (and not to all) my garden of forking paths.*

Wordlessly I returned the paper. Corbie continued:

"Before I unearthed this letter, I had constantly asked myself how a book could be infinite. I could imagine no other method than that of a cyclic, a circular volume. A volume whose last page should be identical with the first, thus possibly continuing indefinitely. I remembered too that night which stands in the centre of the Thousand and One Nights, when Queen Scheherazade (by some magical aberration of the copyist) begins to relate word for word the story of the Thousand and One Nights, incurring the danger of arriving once more at the night in which she tells the story of the Nights, and thus

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continuing to infinity. I conceived also an hereditary work, transmitted from father to son, to which each new generation should add a chapter or correct with pious care the pages of its ancestors.

"These conjectures served to entertain me; but none of them seemed to correspond, even remotely, to the contradictory chapters of Ts'ui Pên. In this perplexity I received from Oxford the letter which you have examined. I paused, naturally, at the phrase: *I leave to the various futures (and not to all) my garden of forking paths.* Almost instantly I understood: the garden of forking paths was the chaotic novel; the phrase, *the various futures (and not all)*, suggested to my mind a forking, a bifurcation, not in space, but in time. Another survey of the work confirmed this theory. In all other works of fiction, a character confronted with various alternatives chooses one and eliminates the others. In this novel the character chooses — simultaneously — all of them. He thus *creates* varying futures, varying times, which in their turn likewise proliferate and fork. From this arise the 'contradictions' of the novel.

"Fang, let us say, has a secret; an unknown man raps at the door; Fang resolves to kill him. Naturally, this situation may resolve itself in several possible manners: Fang may kill the intruder, the intruder may kill Fang, both may survive, both may perish, and so on. In the work of Ts'ui Pên, *all* these resolutions occur; each one is the point of departure for further forkings. Upon occasion the paths of this maze converge: for example, you arrive at my home; but in one of the possible pasts you are my friend, in another my enemy. If you will tolerate my incurable accent, we shall read a few pages."

In the vivid circle of lamplight his face was unquestionably that of an old man; but there was something unbreakable about it, even immortal. He read, with slow precision, two versions of the same epic chapter. In the first, an army marches toward battle across a barren mountain; the horror of the rocks and shadows causes them to hold their lives cheap and they gain an easy victory. In the second, the same army passes through a palace where a festival is in progress; the glittering battle seems to them a continuation of the festival and they gain an easy victory. With seemly veneration I listened to these ancient narratives, perhaps less admirable in themselves than because my blood had conceived them and because a man of a remote Empire had restored them to me in the course of a desperate adventure in a Western isle. I remember the last words, repeated in each version like a hidden commandment: *Thus did the heroes fight, peace in their noble hearts and violence in their swords, resolved to kill and to die.*

From that moment on I felt about me and within me an invisible, intangible swarming. Not the swarming of the divergent, parallel, ultimately coalescing armies, but an agitation at once more inaccessible and more

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intimate, which the armies in some manner prefigured. Stephen Corbie continued:

"I do not believe that your illustrious ancestor was playing an idle game with his variations. I do not find it plausible that he should sacrifice thirteen years in the infinite execution of a rhetorical experiment. In your country the novel is a subsidiary form of literature; in his time it was even a contemptible one. Ts'ui Pên was a novelist of genius, but he was also a man of letters who assuredly did not consider himself a mere novelist. The evidence of his contemporaries demonstrates (and his own life confirms) his leanings toward the metaphysical, the mystical. Philosophical debate usurps a large portion of the novel. From other sources I know that of all problems none so perturbed and beset him as the abysmal problem of Time. And yet, that is the *only* problem which does not figure in the pages of *The Garden*. Not once does he employ even the very character which means Time. How do you account for this deliberate omission?"

I advanced various solutions, none of them satisfactory. We discussed them, and at last Stephen Corbie said:

"In a riddle the answer to which is 'chess,' what is the one forbidden word?"

I reflected a moment and answered, "The word *chess*."

"Precisely," said Corbie. "*The Garden of Forking Paths* is a vast riddle, or parable, whose meaning is Time; that recondite cause forbids the mention of the word. Always to omit a word, to seek refuge in inept metaphors or blatant periphrases, is perhaps the most emphatic method of stressing that word. It is the tortuous method preferred, in each meandering of his indefatigable novel, by the oblique Ts'ui Pên. I have collated hundreds of manuscripts, I have corrected the errors introduced by the carelessness of copyists, I have conjectured the plan of this chaos, I have reëstablished (I believe) the primordial order, I have translated the entire work — constantly struck by the fact that the translation never once necessitated the use of the word *time*. The explanation is obvious: *The Garden of Forking Paths* is an image, incomplete but not inaccurate, of the universe as Ts'ui Pên conceived it.

"Your ancestor differed from Newton and Schopenhauer in not believing in one uniform and absolute Time. He believed in an infinite series of Time, in a waxing, dizzying web of times, divergent, convergent, and parallel. This network of times which draw near each other, fork out of each other, cut across each other, or — know nothing of each other for centuries — these times embrace *all* possibilities. In most of these times we do not exist. In some you exist and I do not; in others I but not you; in yet others, both of us. In this time a favorable fate has granted that you enter my house; in another, you found me dead as you crossed the garden; in another, I am saying these very

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words, but I am an illusion, a phantom."

"In all times," I pronounced, not without a tremor, "I offer you my gratitude and veneration for your remaking of the garden of Ts'ui Pên."

"Not in all," he murmured smiling. "Time forks forever toward innumerable futures. In one of them I am your enemy."

Once more I felt that swarming of which I spoke. It seemed to me that the moist garden outside the house was infinitely saturated with invisible personages. And all of them were Corbie and I, vowed to other secrets, laden with other tasks, shaped in other forms in other dimensions of time. I raised my eyes; the tenuous nightmare dissolved. In the yellow and black garden there was only one man; but that man was strong as a statue; that man was coming toward me down the path and he was Captain Richard Madden.

"The future exists already," I said, "but I am your friend. May I look at the letter again?"

Corbie rose. The tall old man opened the drawer of the tall desk; for a moment he turned his back on me. I had the revolver ready. I fired with the utmost care; Corbie fell immediately, without a word. I swear that his death was instantaneous, a lightning-stroke.

The rest is unreal and insignificant. Captain Madden burst in and arrested me. I have been sentenced to hang. And I have won abominably; I have communicated to Berlin the secret name of the city which they must attack. They bombed it yesterday; I read that in the very papers which presented the English people with the puzzle of why the learned Sinologue Stephen Corbie should have been murdered by a stranger, Yu Tsun. The Chief has deciphered this puzzle. He knows that my problem was how to indicate (across the uproar of the war) the city called Corbie and that *I found no other solution save to murder a man of that name.*

He does not know (no one can know) my unspeakable regret and weariness.

"O"

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Canada sits at our 'tec table of United Nations in the person of Edgar D. Smith, a writer unknown to American detective-story fans. Mr. Smith was born thirty years ago in Macleod, Alberta. At the time we purchased the rights to reprint his story, he was living in Victoria, British Columbia, where he was doing free-lance journalism for newspapers and magazines, and quite a bit of radio broadcasting, especially on the network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Mr. Smith's past work includes mystery dramas for radio and numerous factual articles in Canadian magazines on criminology. He took his training for journalism at the University of Southern California, and aside from writing, his main hobby is classical music.

"Killer in Khaki" is one of the most ingenious variations we have read in many a moon on the always fascinating theme of "the invisible man": a series of cold-blooded murders and a murderer who vanishes into thin air: the "miracle" problem which never fails to stir the imagination and grip the minds of those readers who want the pure detective story in its most baffling form. Dig in: you're in for a battle of wits — or, if you prefer, a tale of suspense calculated to make you hear noises in the night.

KILLER IN KHAKI

by EDGAR D. SMITH

THERE were two clearly defined steps leading up to his crime. The first was at bayonet practice. That thrust into the dummy awakened an impulse, savage and filled with a primitive exultation. Perhaps we can excuse him by saying that he, himself, had never suspected its presence — the impulse to kill — until that moment. He jabbed again, and suddenly wished that the dummy were a real man.

The true soldier, well-disciplined, can control that impulse. But this man had no control of it. The urge grew stronger, till it dominated him, completely and with a terrible lust. On the shooting range he took to thinking the butts were not just targets, but his own officers. That was step two — incipient madness.

And yet he was a man like other men. Tall, broad-shouldered, and with a pleasant, friendly face. He was good-natured, popular with the rest of his khaki-clad comrades in the military training camp. The medical board had passed him as A-1. But the truth remains: he should never have been a soldier.

At the end of a month, and despite no outward signs of abnormality, he

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was quite insane. Which fact made it only a matter of time before he took step three.

It was snug and warm inside the tent, with the candle flickering cosily on the brown canvas walls. The bugle, sharp and clear, had just called Lights Out.

It was late September, the month when night begins to fall more quickly, especially in the foothills rolling up the Canadian Rockies. All day huge clouds had hung low in the somber sky, like pudding bowls, and now the frosty east wind from the prairies struck them, tilted them so that they slopped out water from the brims and drenched the military camp.

Private Enly, stripping for bed, listened to the rain's steady tattoo on the canvas. He had just come in from the Sally Ann, where he had been entertaining some fellows with his new hobby, ventriloquism. Enly was the biggest man in B Company; two hundred and twenty pounds in weight, six-foot four in height. No one, looking at those friendly, twinkling blue eyes, the humorous mouth, the jovial tone of his voice, would have taken him for a young police constable before joining up.

"Where's Brigs?" he asked. Brigs, the French-Canadian, was third man in the tent.

Trelawny yawned. He was a stout Cornishman, of a rather saturnine countenance. His bare chest was covered with hair like a gorilla's. He had a deep voice and a queer accent.

"He went out on a pass. If he's overstayed it, he'll have to sneak in past the guard-house."

But Brigs would never again do "fatigue." A sentry found him next morning at the bottom of a small knoll, his body twisted and the foxtails crimson with his blood. The bayonet glinted coldly in the false, chilly dawn; it had half-severed the French-Canadian's head from the neck.

There was a court martial; and some Mounted Police were notified in camp. An ominous gloom fell upon the stricken field.

"Poor old Brigs," said a corporal that night in the Sally Ann. The speaker was surrounded by a number of soldiers. "To think of him being killed like that."

One man in the group lit a cigarette. "Wonder what they'll do about it," he said. And, blowing a smoke ring, the murderer moved away.

Remarkable how Fate works these things. For if "Fatty" Murchin had not awakened around midnight — exactly one week later — he would still be alive.

But he did wake up, with a bad stomach ache. He was just a boy, not yet twenty, with an easy good nature that made him pals with everyone. He was not more than five-foot five, yet he weighed one hundred and ninety pounds. His face, with its two chins, was fat and jovial; his cheeks bulged with a jolly benevolence to all.

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No one could ever want to harm "old Fatty." He was such a darned good-natured guy.

At first he tried massaging that Buddha-like belly of his with his enormous hand, kneading it with pudgy fingers. When that did no good, he sat up and stretched his sturdy limbs.

"Ouch!" Fatty groaned. "Musta been that extra bun I had at mess."

And then instinct took a hand. It told him that if he walked about a bit —

Fatty put on a sweater and left the tent. It was chilly outside. The guy-rope tapped against the flagpole like a solemn warning to him to get back into his tent where he would be safe.

"— Or maybe the soup and beer," Fatty complained.

He began walking, slowly, hunched up. If he saw the sergeant he could always explain. And maybe be sent to the doctor and get off his duties next day. That ten-mile march, for instance. Fatty rather hoped he would meet the sergeant. A fresh pang almost doubled him up. He stood still a moment in agony.

From a nearby tent came the stertorous wheezing of a snorer. Fatty moved off on his midnight peregrinations. His fat chest heaved as he filled it with air. Then on again. Down the rows of tents waddled Fatty, and out into the open.

And from behind one of those tents, eyes were watching him. Keen, malevolent eyes that glowed with an unholy light. A dark shadow began to move, cutting off Fatty's retreat. The shadow moved like the ghost of evil, making no sound, giving no warning of its stealthy approach. Somewhere an owl hooted, and from the foothills, lonely and distant, came the desolate howl of a coyote.

Fatty's stomach had now reached the climax of its pain, and he rolled along, caring not where or how far. His blue, gentle eyes were screwed up, and his mouth, big enough to hold enough pastry for two — and keep grinning the while — was opened in agony.

Be careful, Fatty. You're too swell a guy for us to want any harm to befall you. And look! You're going towards the knoll where Brigs was killed. Better turn around and get back to your tent, Fatty. Your stomach ache will be gone by morning. But don't go towards that knoll.

Fatty didn't. He turned and began to waddle back. Good for you, Fatty! Maybe you'll make it — if you hurry. For that shadow has ducked behind a tent and is hiding. You've passed the tent now, Fatty. Look! The shadow is behind you, only a few feet away. It is stalking you like a jungle beast, only it's much more cunning.

"Run, Fatty! Run! It's almost behind you now. It *is* behind you. Turn around, Fatty! Scream! Do anything at all. . . .

Poor old Fatty!

"What gets me," said Jolkes in the Sally Ann that night, "is not why anyone should want to kill Fatty, but how they managed to do it. Here I am on

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sentry duty. For hours I don't hear a thing. Then, suddenly, as I turn around — there he is, lying in front of me — murdered."

There was a group of soldiers about him. Head and shoulders above the others loomed the huge figure of ex-constable Enly. The former policeman looked puzzled.

"If you ask me, Jolkes," he said, "I think you're darned lucky not to have got that bayonet in your own back."

"Eh?"

"Well, Fatty wouldn't ordinarily have left his tent at night, would he? He was killed in your vicinity. Now, suppose he hadn't left the tent. Get the point?"

Jolkes's hand trembled as he put down the cup. "Yes, I get it." The soldier shivered. "My God! You mean the killer was after *me!*"

"Exactly. Only Fatty got in the way."

A hush descended on the Sally Ann. And yet there was not one of those tense soldiers in the hall but felt a deep anger at the slaying. Good old Fatty, the despair of his officers on the parade ground. He sweated and wheezed at drill; yet he never complained. Fatty, who now lay in the soldier's last repose, waiting for Taps.

"I owed Fatty four bits," said one sentimental Tommy. "He was trying to collect only yesterday, but I told him I hadn't got it. He wanted to buy some buns in town."

"Who could want to kill him?" asked another.

"Yes. That's what I'm wondering," the murderer replied.

Another session was called by the military tribunal. But even before it was seated, the regular police assumed control; and detectives came from the city.

The newspapers took up the public cry for a thorough investigation. There was a terse editorial:

> "There is a demon in the camp. A Fiend who strikes without mercy. A Devil, moving on silent feet, prowling among the tents like a midnight ghost. The Fiend certainly is not human. He is a monster, with no motive in his crimes. Rather, they strike one as the savage killing of the jungle beast that creeps only at night, stalking his victim, and with only one purpose — to kill!"

Cruel, malevolent eyes saw this editorial, and thin lips curled in a chuckle. The Fiend threw the journal aside. A week later, Sergeant Grayling was found bayoneted behind the guard-house. And a military newspaper asked: "Who's next?"

"Where you going?" Enly asked as Trelawny stood up in the tent. The Cornishman buttoned his tunic at the neck.

"Just for a walk," he said.

It was a misty night. A heavy ground fog, saturated with frost, hung over the camp so that the tents stood out vaguely, like phantom mushrooms. Trelawny moved on past the line, his figure hazy and distinct as he left the square occupied by B Com-

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pany, approached that used by C Company, and so into the open. A vigorous drizzle was beginning to fall. He walked on, until suddenly a voice addressed him. The voice was high-pitched, frightened. Trelawny found himself standing at the sharp end of a bayonet.

"Oh, it's you," said the sentry, relieved. "Boy, I nearly let you have it, then."

Trelawny smiled grimly. "Did you think I was the Fiend?"

"You startled me, coming so quietly. But you better get back." The Cornishman's eyebrows lifted in surprise. "Orders," explained the sentry. "No one to come through."

"Yes. I'd forgotten." Trelawny paused. "The sentry watch has been doubled, hasn't it?"

"Tripled, more like."

Trelawny turned. There had been a suggestion, he remembered, that the soldiers be allowed to go about armed after night had fallen. And the camp lately had been visited by scores of parents anxious for their soldier sons and relatives.

"Well," he said, "shoot if you see him."

"I'll try."

Five minutes later Corporal Menzies, coming from the bath-house, stumbled over something that lay on the ground. And a moment later: "Trelawny — out there — killed!" he cried, bursting into the Sally Ann.

A stunned silence in the din and bustle of the hall. And then the men moved forward in a group, some swearing, others shouting. The military police soon came up with rifles, and an officer took charge.

"Cover the whole area where Trelawny was found and move in. It's just possible the killer is still hiding if he couldn't get past the sentry."

More orders were given. One for a check-up on the tents and the men who were missing; another for the sounding of a general alarm.

Enly, with two others, was kneeling beside Trelawny when the officer came up. The former policeman moved aside.

"Stabbed in the back, sir. Same as the others."

The officer nodded briskly. By now the field ambulance was on its way; and there was a bigger job ahead. This latest crime had been committed within a radius stretching from the station guarding the eastern entrance to the field and the bath-house. Within that area were quartered A, B, and C Companies of the Engineers. And this narrowed field was rigidly surrounded by sentries. Thus, it was reasonable to suspect that lurking somewhere in this area was the man they were seeking. True, the assassin by now might have mingled with the rest of the men. But there was still one chance.

The captain turned to the sergeant-major. "I want you to check up and find out how many men were missing from their tents when this happened."

"Yes, sir."

"And I want twelve men, armed

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with rifles and torches. At once."

The sergeant-major saluted smartly and went about his task. "The rest of you," continued the captain, for by now the group around Trelawny had been augmented three-score, "spread out and keep in touch with each other." The officer's voice was grim. "There's enough of you here to make a line from the bath-house to the sentry at the east gate. Don't break that line whatever happens. And watch your neighbor. That's important. Because, you never know, *he* may be the one we're looking for."

The men spread out as directed, with a gap of about twelve feet between each two soldiers. The captain spoke to Enly.

"Wasn't Trelawny in your tent?"

Enly's face was grim, the jaws taut. The big man snapped, "Yes, sir."

"Hmm."

There was a steady crunching of marching feet behind them as the twelve men the captain had ordered came up.

"All right, men. I want you to break up into columns of four, one to go east, the other west, and the third column straight ahead. When you reach the boundary, and the sentry, I want you to double about, closing in. But watch each other. The murderer may strike again — if you give him the chance."

Silently the men split up; grimly they moved forward, each man holding his rifle at the hip. They vanished into the mist.

The captain watched them go. He had done the natural, the proper thing, under the circumstances. But still, he couldn't help doubting.

"Perhaps you'd better come with me," he said to Enly. With a peculiar smile: "It's not safe to be alone."

The mist, soggy and mysterious, was like a bizarre curtain which they had to push aside in order to enter the peril beyond.

Enly walked close behind the captain. Somewhere in this area was a man. The Fiend — Perhaps even now he was watching them; waiting, possibly . . .

Once, Enly would have sworn he heard a footstep — ever so soft and padding, like that of an animal — behind him. But when he turned, all he could see was the mist, clammy and stark.

They almost bumped into the sentry.

And to the captain's inquiry:

"No," said the sentry, "I'm sure, sir, nothing has passed me."

The other sentries said the same. Their faces wet and cold with the fog, they had all "heard nothing."

It was almost an hour before the armed soldiers came back to their starting place, so carefully had they searched. There was nothing to report. The captain frowned. It was with a sense of futility that he gave orders that the guard be maintained until dawn.

The men kept their vigil, and the dawn came at last, ironical and palely contemptuous. When it was safe to do so, the men were relieved by a new

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party; and Enly went to the Sally Ann for hot coffee and grub.

The captain made his report to the colonel, who banged the table in impotent fury.

"It's fantastic!" the colonel cried. "Men being murdered right and left, and we're powerless to prevent it!"

"It's more than fantastic, sir," the captain answered. "It's weird and uncanny."

There was an ominous silence over the camp that day. Visitors had been excluded until further notice. A, B, and C Companies were under suspicion. The field seemed to have narrowed.

"But that means nothing," a soldier said. "It could easily be someone from another regiment."

"Yes," agreed the murderer. "It might."

Silence, then, with each man thinking, until Enly asked, "How about the captain's order to find who were missing from their tents?"

Jolkes replied. "Hinderly and King were not in their tents. But they couldn't have done it. Hinderly was in the guard-house, and King was reporting to the sergeant-major for being sloppy in uniform."

The Fiend chuckled.

"I've been thinking about it a great deal," Enly said. "And I've come to one conclusion."

"What's that?" A group of soldiers stood around Enly in the Sally Ann. In the army, more than any other place, men like the big fellows, and every soldier in the room had a deep respect for this huge but quiet and unassuming ex-cop.

"Well, to begin with, he's a man like ourselves. Or at least, he's dressed in khaki like us. But something's gone wrong with him inside. He isn't normal. Yet, oddly enough, or maybe it isn't odd at all, he's a man above suspicion. A fellow we'd suspect least of all. Otherwise, how can he kill in the presence of a sentry, and then vanish under everyone's nose?"

Enly's huge shoulders hunched in a deprecatory gesture. "What I'm getting at," he said, "is this. If we did see the killer, we wouldn't suspect him."

"I don't get you."

"Okay. We'll put it another way, then. Take the case of Fatty. Would you suspect him of — shall we say — going on a diet?"

"Fatty? On a diet? Hell, no!"

"Well, then, what I'm getting at is, that no one would suspect the Fiend of being a killer."

"Meaning what?"

"That we've gone about solving this case in the wrong way."

A short silence. "You think," someone asked, "you know who he might be?"

Enly spoke deliberately and to no one in particular. "I think I've a jolly good idea."

Later, a figure detached itself from the group and went to the counter.

"A cup of coffee," said the Fiend.

Enly opened the flap of his tent and glanced out.

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The fog still persisted. There were none of the usual sounds that came from a military camp at night. No boisterous talking from the Sally Ann, no sing-song from the hut near by. Occasionally, the sharp noise of the sentry's boot broke the silence, but that was all.

The men had taken to staying in their tents. Most of them now went about in pairs. There were no stragglers tonight. The parade ground had a bleak, desolate appearance, and the only sound was that of water from a tap someone had left running.

Enly took the last puff of his cigarette before crushing it. He left the tent, closing the flap again, and went forward into the night.

And somewhere, wrapped up in the chilly fog, was another man — a soldier like Enly, and yet not like Enly. This other man, too, was big and tall and strong.

There was also a third man — Private Corncot, who had been up to the Sally Ann to buy himself a five-cent cigar. Corncot saw that huge form vaguely before him and said, "Hullo."

Enly stood quite still, without turning. But he suddenly tensed himself, and as Corncot drew near, glanced at the fellow from the corner of his eye.

"Oh," said Enly. "It's you."

"Yus," said Corncot, who was a Cockney. "Who jer fink it was? The bloody Killer?"

Enly did not reply.

They walked on a few steps, the Cockney's figure small and obscure beside that of his companion, somewhat like a tugboat beside a liner. They came to C Company where Corncot lived, and in departure the Cockney made a feeble essay at French.

"Well, *bong sewer*," he said.

Enly stood a moment, regarding him. They were quite alone. "*Bon soir*," he answered. And watched with narrowed gaze as the other vanished into a tent.

"I seen Enly walking abaht," Corncot informed his cronies. "And he looked no end queer — not 'arf, 'e didn't. Bloomin' hox musta finked I wuz thet perishin' killer of ours." With which Corncot sat down to enjoy his five-center.

Enly moved on into the night. But his footsteps were more cautious. He had passed the last row of tents; and now, well out on the grounds, he saw a man.

This second figure, too, was moving with a quiet stealth. As Enly approached, the fellow turned. Each peered into the other's face.

They made a queer, almost ghostly picture, with the writhing fog all around them. Enly was taller, but the other was big and muscular. And into the mind of one of the men came a swift flash of intuition.

This is him!

Enly spoke casually. "Just walking," he began abruptly. "I've been thinking of these murders. Can't get 'em off my mind."

"Oh?"

"You see, the thing has been so absolutely obvious all along. There's

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only one man it could possibly be. That's why, of all people, we never suspected him. In fact, he'd be the last to suspect. Here we have a killer — a maniac — who can disappear before a sentry and who can evade a whole squad of men searching for him. What does that suggest?"

"Well? What *does* it suggest?" came back the answer, slowly.

"It suggests that we've all been fools. But there's another point. Why did he want to do it? He had no motive. Only the lust to kill — which I think I can explain."

As if by mutual consent, the two men had begun walking. Two pairs of army boots scraped the freezing earth. There is something rather sinister in — just boots. They bring men closer together. The killer to his victim — And one pair of boots was now narrowing the gap between two men. Drawing closer. . . .

"Take a child, for instance," Enly continued. "You give him a toy gun. What does he do but go about shooting imaginary bandits and pirates? The gun, you see, suggests killing to the infant mind. Now take such a child who has grown up and become a soldier. He is taught how to kill scientifically. He is given a real gun and a bayonet. The well-trained soldier is only a legalized murderer. And here, in this camp, we have a man who, having been taught to kill, cannot wait to do so. He is not normal; he has no control over himself."

The boots were very close now.

"Then," Enly went on, "take the weapon. Of all the victims, Brigs was the only one found with the bayonet in him. In his case, I think the killer had two bayonets, one of which he might have forgotten to turn in. Fellows have done that, you know. And their only punishment is a reprimand. But the murderer had to have another to prove his innocence. Which can only mean that he was armed all along. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is this: why couldn't the killer, who can evade sentries and a squad searching for him, *be a sentry, himself?*"

Both pairs of boots had now stopped and turned to face each other. Not an inch separated toe from toe.

"Okay, then. Next, I got to thinking of the time of the crimes. That meant I had to find who, on those nights, had been doing sentry duty. And, discovering that, which sentry was nearest to the scenes of the murders. When this was all added together, the sum total was an arrow — pointing to one man."

And then Enly felt the prick of a bayonet in his stomach. He did not flinch, but said, "Well, Jolkes? How about it? Am I correct?"

The sentry nodded. "It certainly adds up, like you say. What do you intend to do about it?"

"Nothing. Except wait — and see what you intend to do."

"That's easy. I can put a bullet in you where you stand. And who is to blame me? I can say I challenged you and you refused to halt. So, obeying orders, I let you have it. Which perhaps isn't a bad idea. That way, I

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exonerate myself. I won't kill any more after tonight. Then, when the crimes stop, they'll think you were the Fiend. Yes. Not at all a bad idea, that."

"But foolish, Jolkes, if you try it. Do you think I was crazy enough to tackle you alone?" The ex-constable raised his voice slightly to address someone else. "All right, Sergeant. You can take him now."

Jolkes did not move. But a sly grin spread over his contorted face, wet with mist. "Where have I heard that one before? There's no one behind me, Enly. I know you're alone. So do you."

And Jolkes raised the rifle, the point of the bayonet scraping the other's khaki till it was aimed at the ex-policeman's chest. Jolkes was squeezing the trigger.

And then —

"Drop that rifle, Jolkes!" said a deep voice behind the sentry. "Come on, drop it!"

Jolkes half-turned, swearing. And Enly hurled his two hundred and twenty pounds upon him.

"Insane beyond a doubt," the captain said after the military tribunal. "And at the trial — Good Lord! Did you see him?"

Enly was solemn. "Mad as a coot, sir. But he gave me one bad moment when he refused to believe I was not alone that night. It was touch and go. Jolkes said it was an old gag, my remark to the sergeant who was supposed to be there. And so it was. But he referred to the wrong trick and not to my hobby. Ventriloquism, you know, sir."

NEXT MONTH . . .

EQMM will contain: A Second Prize Winner;

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY by *Helen McCloy*
(the first short story about Dr. Basil Willing)

and the Special Prize Winner for the best tour de force;

THE LADY AND THE TIGER by *Jack Moffitt*

also

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GENT'S ROMEO by *Margery Sharp*
MURDER-WALKS IN MARBLE HALLS by *Lawrence G. Blochman*
FAREWELL PERFORMANCE by *Q. Patrick*
HARD GUY by *Thomas Walsh*
CRIME LESSON by *Dale Clark*

and other top-drawer stories

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As the American delegate to this United Nations issue we have chosen Cornell Woolrich, one of the most dynamic talents in contemporary crime writing. Most of his stories, whether signed as by Cornell Woolrich or William Irish, are psychological thrillers, powerful in their atmosphere of terror and suspense, and often ending in a whiplash of surprise that reveals the subtlest integration of plot, style, and technique. Anthony Boucher has attributed to Irish-Woolrich's work an "enormous impact of the everyday-gone-wrong" — the kindling of that peculiar cauld grue *or* frisson d'horreur *which lurks implacably in and around the commonplace.*

THE NIGHT REVEALS

by CORNELL WOOLRICH

HARRY JORDAN awoke with a start in complete darkness. The only thing he could make out at first was a ghostly greenish halo looming at him from across the room, bisected by a right angle: the radium dial of the clock on the dresser. He squinted his blurred eyes to get it in focus, and the halo broke up into twelve numbers, with the hand at three and six. Half-past three in the morning; he'd only been asleep four hours and had four more to go.

Instead of turning over and trying again, he suddenly sat up, wide awake now. He'd had a strange feeling that he was alone in the room from the minute he first opened his eyes. He knew he wasn't, knew he must be wrong, still he couldn't get rid of it, any more than he could have explained it. Probably one of those dim instincts still lurking just below the surface in most human beings, he thought with a shiver, harking back to the days when they were just hairy tree dwellers.

Well, he'd knock it for a loop and then go back to pounding his ear, only way to get rid of it.

He pivoted on his elbow, reached out gingerly to touch the Missis' shoulder, convince himself she was right where she was every night. Blank pillow was all that met his touch, and the instinct that had warned him seemed to be laughing down the ages — it had been right after all. He threshed around the other way, flipped on the light on that side of him, turned back again to look. The pillow bore an imprint where her head had rested, that was all; the bedclothes were turned triangularly down on that side. Oh well, maybe she'd got up to get a glass of water —

He sat there for awhile giving his

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head a massage. Then when she didn't come back he got up and went out to see if there was anything the matter. Maybe the kid was sick, maybe she'd gone to his room. He opened the closed door as quietly as he could. The room was dark.

"Marie," he whispered urgently. "You in here?"

He snapped on the light, just to make sure. She wasn't. The kid was just a white mound, sleeping the way only a nine-year-old can; flashlight powder wouldn't have awakened him. He eased the door shut once more. There wasn't any other place she could be, she wouldn't be in the living room at this hour of the morning. He gave that the lights too, then cut them again. So far he'd been just puzzled, now he was starting to get worried.

He went back to the bedroom, put on his shoes and pants. The window in there was only open from the top, so there hadn't been any accident or anything like that. Her clothes were missing from the chair, she'd dressed while he was asleep. He went out to the door of the apartment and stood looking up and down the prim fireproof corridor. He knew she wouldn't be out there; if she'd come this far, then she would have gone the rest of the way — to wherever it was she was going. The empty milk bottle was still standing there with a curled-up note in it, as he'd seen it when he locked up at eleven. There wasn't really anything to get scared about, it was just that it was so damned inexplicable! He'd given up all thought of trying to go back to sleep until this was solved. All the time he kept rubbing one hand down the back of his neck, where he was in need of a haircut.

He knew for a fact that she wasn't a sleepwalker, she'd never suffered from that as far as he could recall. She hadn't received an emergency call from some relatives in the dead of night, because neither of them had any. And she hadn't got sore at him suddenly and gone off and left him, because they got along hand-in-glove. Take tonight for instance, just before turning in, when he'd filled his pipe for one last smoke, the way she'd insisted on lighting it for him instead of letting him do it himself, the affectionate way she'd held the match until the bowl glowed red, and that stunt she was so fond of doing, turning the match around in her fingers and holding the little stick by the head until the other end of it had burned down. When they got along so swell, how could she have anything against him? And the interest she showed in hearing him tell about his work each night, the way she drank in the dry details of his daily grind, asking him what premises if any he'd inspected that day and what report he was turning in to the office on them and all about it — that wasn't just pretended, it couldn't have been; she showed too much understanding, too much real eagerness. Instead of lessening, her interest in his job seemed to increase if anything as time went

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on. They'd never even had an angry word between them, not in five years now, not since that awful night riding in the cab when the door had opened suddenly and she fell out on her head and he thought for a minute he'd lost her.

He stepped across the corridor finally and punched the elevator button. If she'd been taken ill suddenly and needed medicine — but he'd been right in the room with her, and they had a telephone in the place. The elevator came up and the night operator shoved the slide out of the way. This was going to sound dumb as hell, but she wasn't in the flat with him, that much he was sure of. "Did, did — Mrs. Jordan didn't go down with you a little while ago, did she?" he asked.

"Yes sir, she did," the man said. "But that was quite awhile ago. I took her down about happast two."

She'd been gone over an hour already! His face lengthened with anxiety, but it gave him a good excuse to say, "I think I'll go down with you, wait for her by the front door." On the way down he swallowed a few times, and then finally came out with more than he had wanted to. "She say where she was going?" He hung on the fellow's words, leaning toward him in the car.

"Said she couldn't sleep, just wanted to get a breath of fresh air."

Reassuring, matter-of-fact as the reason sounded, he couldn't get all the comfort out of it he needed. "She should be back by now," he murmured, looking down at the floor. She might have been knocked down by a taxi, waylaid by a purse snatcher, a woman alone at that hour of the night! His face was a shade paler at the thought as he stepped from the elevator out to the front door and stood there scanning the desolate street, first up one way, then down the other. To notify the police still seemed a little drastic, like borrowing trouble, but if she wasn't back pretty soon — he turned around. "Which way'd she go?" he asked the porter.

"Down toward Third," the man said. Which was certainly the less safe of the two directions, the other one being Park. They were on Lexington. What could she want down there, under the shadow of the El, where drunks lying sprawled in doorways were not an uncommon sight? He began to walk slowly back and forth on the sidewalk in front of the lighted doorway. "I can't imagine —" he said a couple of times, for the benefit of the porter who had come out and joined him. He was a pipe smoker, but this was no time for a pipe. He took a package of cigarettes out of the pocket of his jacket, which he'd put on over his undershirt. He gave the man one as well as himself, and then he felt for the folder of matches he always carried in his side pocket. They weren't there; he'd handed them to Marie when she'd asked him to let her light his pipe for him earlier in the evening, and she must have forgotten to give them back to him. He tapped himself all over; she'd kept them all right,

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absent-mindedly, or they would be on him now.

The porter went in, got some, and came out again.

"I wouldn't worry if I was you Mr. Jordan," he remarked sympathetically; Jordan's fears were beginning to be easily discernible on his face. "I don't think she went very far away, she'll prob'ly be back any minute now."

And just as the calming words were being spoken, Jordan made her out, coming alone up the street toward them, from the corner of Third Avenue. She was walking very quickly, but without showing any signs of being frightened. As she joined him in the radius of the lighted doorway there was nothing either furtive or guilty about her; it might have been four in the afternoon instead of four in the morning.

"Tsk, tsk," she clucked comfortingly, "I just know you've been worried sick about me, haven't you?"

They rode upstairs together without either of them saying anything further in the presence of the houseman. Her seedy, shapeless black coat, five years old now, looked as dilapidated as ever; she'd gone out without a hat and her graying hair was even untidier than usual as a result; otherwise she looked just the way she always did. She was carrying a small package done up in vivid green drugstore paper.

When he'd closed the door on the two of them once more, Jordan turned to her: "What on earth made you do that? You gave me a good stiff fright, I can tell you that!" There was no melodrama in the way he said it and no melodrama in the way she answered; just a man and wife talking something over quietly.

"I felt I just had to get some fresh air into my lungs," she said simply. "I'd been lying there two solid hours without being able to close my eyes. You must have woke up right after I left," she said casually.

He stopped unlacing his shoes and looked up at her in surprise. "Why, he said you'd been gone nearly an hour!"

"Well, I like that!" she said in mild indignation. "What ails him anyway? I wasn't out of the house fifteen minutes all told — just once around the block and then I stopped in at that all-night druggist on Third, Geety's, and bought a box of aspirin." She unwrapped it virtuously and showed it to him. "Are you going to take my word for it, Harry Jordan, or that no-account employee downstairs?" she demanded, but without heat. "My stars, I ought to know how long I was gone, I'm not that feeble-minded!" All this, in an easygoing drawl between the two of them, without any emphasis or recrimination.

"Forget it, Marie," he said good-naturedly bending over his shoes once more. "He must have dozed off for a minute and lost track of the time." He yawned cavernously. The thin eery wail of a fire truck came floating in on the still night air, but from such a great distance that it sounded miles

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away; it must have been at least two or three blocks to the east, Second or Third Avenue. "All set?" droned Jordan sleepily, and without waiting for any answer he snapped the lights out. Almost before the current had left the filaments he was sleeping the sleep of the just, now that his good wife was back at his side.

He was a little dopey next day at the office from the unaccustomed break in his sleep the night before, but there wasn't much to do, just type out the report he'd made on that blaze the week before up in Washington Heights. The building had been still under construction, within an ace of completion, when it was mysteriously gutted and just the walls left standing. Neither his own investigation nor the report of the Fire Marshal's office had been able to unearth any evidence that the fire was incendiary: that is to say, deliberate instead of accidental. True, there had been some vague reports of labor trouble, but he had tracked them down and found them to be absolutely groundless; there had been no difficulties of any kind between the contractors and the labor union. Another thing, the blaze had taken place on a Sunday evening, a full day and a half after the workmen had knocked off.

It had been fairly easy to trace its point of origin. One apartment, on the ground floor, had been completed and opened for inspection to prospective tenants. Marie herself, for that matter, had been up there to look at it; she'd been heartbroken when he told her the next day what had happened. As he reconstructed it, some careless visitor had tossed a cigarette into a closet while being shown through the lay-out. The renting agent had locked up and gone home at six, taking the key with him, and the fire had smouldered away in there for the next two hours. The night watchman had no key to the place, so that absolved him of responsibility. He'd discovered it through the windows around eight.

All this was in the notes Jordan had prepared for his report. His reports were never questioned. If they said "Pay," the company paid; if they said "No Indemnity," the company told its legal talent to stand by for action. Harry Jordan was its best investigator. He slipped a sheet of stationery letterheaded "Hercules Mutual Fire Insurance Corporation" under the roller of the typewriter and began laboriously picking out letters on the keyboard with two fingers. He always hated this part of the job; it was with hopeful anticipation therefore that he looked up as the president's secretary halted beside him. "E. P. would like to see you in his office as soon as you're through."

"This can wait," he said, gratefully, and went in through a frosted-glass door.

"Morning," Parmenter said. "Read about that awful thing on the upper East Side?"

"I got away late this morning,

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didn't get a look at my paper," Jordan admitted. Parmenter showed him his, folded back to the third page. "That's us, you know," he added while Jordan moved his lips soundlessly down the column.

The latter looked up, startled. "One of those old-law tenements; I didn't know we covered—"

"We did this time," Parmenter told him gloomily. "The bank had taken it over for an investment, tinkered with it a little, slapped on a little paint, replaced the vertical escapes with horizontals so technically it was no longer strictly old-law. It didn't pan out as well as they'd expected, so they turned it over to a guy named Lapolla, and he had even more extensive remodelling scheduled for the latter part of this month, soon as they could dispossess the remaining tenants. Well, on the strength of that we sold him coverage. He just called me a little while ago, tearing out his hair by the handfuls. Place is a complete wreck and if it hadn't been for the new escapes, incidentally, everyone on the upper floors would have been cremated alive. As it is there's three or four of them in the hospital right now with second-degree burns." He motioned with the folded paper. "According to this it started behind the stairs on the ground floor. They have it listed as 'suspicious origin'."

"You think it smells sort of funny yourself, that it?" asked Jordan.

"Not from the angle of Lapolla, as beneficiary, trying to pull a fast one on us — take out insurance and then commit arson on his own property; we've been handling him off and on since '31. He's straight. But there's always this thought: the type of people living in a dump like that would be ignorant enough to resent being cleared out for the remodelling, and one of 'em might have tried to get even with the landlord. Anyway, Jordan, you know what to do, give the premises a look-see, get depositions from the janitor and whoever was in the building at the time — or as soon as they're in a condition to make any. Track down this 'suspicious origin' tag the paper has given it for all it's worth, and if you find any evidence —" But Jordan was already closing the frosted-glass door behind him, the paper wedged in his pocket.

Burned buildings were nothing new to him, but this one was a complete mess, and the teeming tenements all around it only gave its exploded blackened window-spaces an added touch of grisliness. Not a pane of glass, not a splinter of frame, had been left in the whole façade; it was just a shell, and they already had the ropes up to bring down the front wall before nightfall.

"Investigator for the underwriters," he said, and they let him through the barrier as soon as he'd produced his credentials.

"Three-alarmer," said his departmental escort, flashing his torch down the nightmare hallway from just within the entrance. "I still don't know how we got 'em all out, even with the nets. I tell you, if it had

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happened a month sooner, before the new escapes had been tacked on, it woulda made history. Mushroomed up the well, like most of 'em do." He turned his flash upward and the beam lost itself out of sight. There was no ceiling to stop it, just a weird network of charred beams through which the open sky peered from six stories above, where the roof had fallen through and disintegrated on its way down like something strained through a succession of sieves.

"Anything phony-looking about it?" asked Jordan. He edged forward along the fresh planking that had been laid between the doorway and the skeletonized staircase.

"Why would there have to be?" was the answer. "The way they leave their baby carriages parked behind the stairs . . . you can count the frames of four of 'em back there right now, and cripes knows what other junk was piled on 'em that's just ashes now! That's begging for it to happen!"

"That where it started, you think?"

"Must've. The basement under us wasn't touched, and fire eats up, not down — Hey, stay back here, those stairs would fold up if a cat tried to walk on 'em!"

"Lemme that a minute," said Jordan, reaching for the torch. "I'm not going up, I just want to take a look behind 'em. Nothing ever happened to me yet in one of these places."

He sidled forward to the end of the plank, then got off it onto the original flooring, which was ankle-deep in debris that had fallen from above but hadn't given way on this floor. Testing it each step of the way before he put his weight down on it, he advanced slowly to what had been the back of the hall. The torch revealed a number of tortured metal frames, upthrust under the stairs, that had once been the hoops enclosing baby carriages. The heat here must have been terrific at the height of the blaze; the door that had once led downward to the basement was completely burned away. An iron knob and two twisted hinges were all that remained to show there had been one. The steps going down were brick however; they remained.

"C'mon back," the assistant marshal said irritably, "before you bring the whole works down on us!"

Jordan got down on his heels and began to paw about, using the rib of an umbrella for a poker. Fine ash, that had once been the pillows and blankets lining the carriages, billowed up, tickling his nostrils. He sneezed and blew a little round clear space on the charred floor boards.

It was when he had straightened up and turned to go, and had already shifted the torch away, that he first saw it. It sent up a dull gleam for an instant as the light flickered over it. He turned back to it with the flash, lost track of it at first, then finally found it again. It had fallen into one of the springs of the erstwhile perambulators and adhered there, soldered on by the heat like a gob of yellow-brown chewing gum. He

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touched it, pried it loose with a snap, it came off hard as a rock. It was, as a matter of fact, very much like a pebble, but it was metal, he could see that. He was going to throw it away, but when he scratched the surface of it with his thumbnail, it showed up brighter underneath, almost like gold. He found his way back to the fire marshal and showed it to him.

"What do you make of this?"

The marshal didn't make very much of it.

"One of the bolts or gadgets on one of them go-carts, melted down, that's all," he said.

But it obviously wasn't one of the "bolts or gadgets" or it wouldn't have fused with the heat like that, the rest of the springs and frames hadn't; and what metal was softer than iron and yellow — but gold? He slipped it into his pocket. A jeweler would be able to tell him in a minute — not that that would prove anything, either.

"What time was the alarm sent in?" he asked the marshal.

"The first one came in at the central station about 3:30, then two more right on top of it."

"Who turned the first one in, got any idea?"

"Some taxi driver; he's got an early morning stand down at the next corner."

Jordan traced the cab man to the garage where he bedded his car. He caught him just as he was leaving on a new shift.

"I heard glass bust," he said, "and first I thought it was a burglary, then when I look I see smoke steaming out."

"Had you seen anyone go in or leave before that happened?"

"Tell you the truth, I was reading by the dashlight, didn't look up oncet until I heard the smash."

At the emergency ward, where the three worst sufferers had been taken, Jordan found none in a condition to talk to him. Two were under morphine and the third, a top floor tenant named Dillhoff, swathed in compresses steeped in strong tea to form a protective covering replacing burned-away tissue, could only stare up at him with frightened eyes above the rim of the gauze that muffled even his face. His wife, however, was there at the bedside.

"Yah, insurance!" she broke out hotly when Jordan had introduced himself. "He gets his money — but vot do I get if my man diess?"

He let her get that out of her system first, then, — "Some of those people that Lapolla forced to vacate were pretty sore, weren't they? Did you ever hear any of them make any threats, say they'd get even?"

Her eyes widened as she got the implication. "Ach, no, no!" she cried wringing her hands, "we vas all friends togedder, they would not do that to those that shtayed behind! No, they vas goot people, poor maybe, but goot!"

"Was the street door left open at nights or locked?"

"Open, always open."

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"Then anybody could have walked into the hallway that didn't belong there? Did you, at any time during the past few days, pass anyone, notice anyone, in the hall or on the stairs that didn't live in the house?"

Not a soul. But then she never went out much, she admitted.

He left on that note, got in touch with the rewrite man who had shaped the account sent in by the reporter who had covered it. "What'd he say that made you people label it 'suspicious origin'?"

"I put that in myself for a space-filler," the writer admitted airily. "Anything with three alarms, it don't hurt to give it a little eery atmosphere —"

Jordan hung up rather abruptly, his mouth a thin line. So he'd been on a wild goose chase all day, had he, on account of the careless way some city rooms tossed around phrases! There wasn't a shred of evidence, as far as he'd been able to discover, that it was anything but accidental.

Parmenter, when he went back at five after seeing Lapolla and getting a statement from the Chief Fire Marshal himself, nodded in agreement after listening to him outline the results of his investigation.

"Make out your report," he said briefly. "I'll see that a check's sent to Lapolla as soon as he files his claim."

Jordan wound up both reports, the one he'd been working on that morning and the new one, then went home, still heartily disgusted with the methods of city journalism. The kid scuffled to the door to let him in, gambolled about him. Marie planted an amiable kiss on his cheek. "Something you like, dear — giblets," she beamed.

It was when she turned her head to reach for something behind her, near the end of the meal, that he looked twice at her neck. "Something missing on you —"

She touched her throat absently. "Oh, I know — my locket, isn't that what you mean?"

"What'd you do, lose it?"

"No," she said slowly, "it finally came off, after all these years. I left it at the jeweler's to be fixed."

"That reminds me —" he said, and touched his side pocket.

"Reminds you of what?" she asked calmly.

"Oh, nothing, never mind," he answered. If it was worth anything, gold, maybe the jeweler'd give him some trinket in exchange he could surprise her with. He got up and went out again right after the meal, said he'd be right back.

"My wife's locket ready yet?" he asked the little skull-capped man behind the counter.

"What locket?" was the tart response. "She left no locket with me. I haven't seen your wife in three months, Mr. Jordan."

Must've been some other shop then. He coughed to cover up the mistake. "Well, as long as I'm in here, take a look at this. Worth anything?" He spilled the shapeless calcinated blob of metal onto the glass counter.

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The old man screwed a glass into his eye, touched a drop of nitric acid to it, nodded.

"Yop, it's gold. Wait, I find out if it's solid or just plated."

He took a file, began to scrape it back and forth across the surface. There was a tiny click, as though he'd broken it. He turned back to Jordan, holding his palm out in astonishment to show him. There were two blobs now instead of one, both identical in outline but thinner; two halves of what had been a locket before it fused together in the fire. A little powdered glass dribbled off one, like sugar, as the jeweler moved his hand.

"What's that, there?" said Jordan, pointing to a scorched oval of paper adhering to one side. "Lemme use that glass a minute!"

With the naked eye it was just a brown blank, like undeveloped film; under the glass a dim outline revealed itself.

"Haven't you got anything stronger? Get me a magnifying glass."

The jeweler came hurrying back with it, Jordan got the thing in focus under it, and suddenly found himself looking at a dimmed snapshot of his own kid, taken at the age of three or four. He didn't say a word, just gave a peculiar heaving snort down his nose, like a horse drinking water. There couldn't be any mistake, it was no optical illusion, the glass played up the engraved lettering on the inside of the other half-locket: "H. J. to M. J. 1925."

He heard some other guy walk out of the shop saying to the jeweler he didn't want to sell it after all; it must have been himself, because here he was on his way back home with it again. He didn't say a word when he got in, just sat there reading the account of the fire in the morning's paper over and over, and shivering a little more each time. Finally he put the crusher on that by getting up and pouring himself a shot from the bottle in the closet.

"What jeweler'd you leave that locket with?" he asked her quietly.

She looked up from one of the kid's stockings she was darning. "Old man Elias," she answered unhesitatingly. "He's the only one I know of around here."

He'd just been there. He didn't say another word for the next hour. Then, very slowly, around eleven he took out his pipe for his usual last smoke. He had to keep his wrists from trembling as he reached for the tobacco tin, filled the bowl, pressed it in with his thumb. His lashes were low over his eyes the whole time, it was hard to tell where he was looking. He took a folder of matches out of his pocket, she came right over to him with a housewifely smile. "No, no, that's my job," she said. She lit the pipe for him and then she turned the flickering match upside down, deftly pinched it at the head, and let it burn itself up to a finish. He kept looking down his nose at the bowl of his pipe, and beyond, to where her other hand was. You could only see a quarter of the match folder now; her hand

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covered the rest. You couldn't see it at all now, it had been tucked completely out of sight. She straightened up and moved around the room. She'd forgotten to give him his matches back, as she had the night before. His face was moist sitting there, as if the room were too warm. He got up and went to bed, leaving on his socks and trousers under the covers.

She stayed in the kitchen for awhile, and then she came in carrying a cup and saucer with steam coming from it. "Harry," she said, "I want you to try some of this, just to make sure of getting a good night's sleep. The druggist I was speaking to last night recommended —"

"You seem to need it, not me," he said dryly.

"I just had mine out there," she assured him.

He took the cup from her, sat up, keeping the covers around his shoulders with one hand. "Well, bring me the box and let me see what it is, I like to know what I'm swallowing."

She turned and went out again docilely. He promptly thrust one leg far out, flipped up the lid of the radiator cover, and emptied the cup into the humidifying pan below.

"Tasted swell," he said, handing the cup back when she returned with a can marked "Ovaltine." He gave her a wretched grimace that was the closest he could get to a grin. "Just like in the ads," he said, and flopped limply back on the pillow. The lights went out.

She came in again in about half an hour and bent over him, listening. "Harry," she said guardedly, "Harry," and even shook him a little by the shoulder. He didn't move. "It sure was supposed to be strong, all right!" he thought. He heard the front door close, and he reared up, shoved his feet into his shoes, whipped on his coat, and made for the door. He heard the elevator slide open and shut again outside just as he got there. He tore the flat door open, attempted to catch the elevator before it went down, then stopped short. Stop her? What good would it do to stop her? She'd only say she couldn't sleep again, like last night, and he'd end up by half believing her himself. He had to find out once and for all, make sure, and there was only one way to do that.

He waited till the red shaft light went out before he rang to bring the car back again. It flashed on again, white, and the porter gave him a surprised look when he saw who it was. There wasn't a joke in poor Jordan's whole system, but he managed to force one out nevertheless. "Insomnia seems to be catching." The porter smirked. He didn't believe him, and Jordan didn't blame him.

She was still in sight when he got to the door, hugging the building line as she walked. Third again, where the houses weren't fireproof and there were no doormen. He waited until she'd turned the corner before he started out from their own

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place, because if she should look back — the porter was right beside him the whole time, wondering what it was all about. Jordan covered the pause by pretending to scrape something off the sole of his shoe that wasn't there at all. When he finally got to the corner she was already two blocks up, avenue blocks being shorter than the lateral ones. He crossed over to the other side, so he could get closer to her without being conspicuous, then crept up until he was just half a block behind her, she on the west side, he on the east. The El pillars kept coming between them like a sort of sparse picket fence, and then there were occasional barber poles and empty glass sidewalk display cases to screen him. But she never once looked around.

When she got to the corner where the scene of the fire was, ten blocks north of where they lived, she stopped, and he saw her stand there gazing down the street at the wrecked building. The front wall had been pulled down by now, but the side walls were still up, with an occasional floor beam to link them. It was almost as if she was gloating, the way she stood there devouring the scene, and it was the deadest give-away ever, that she knew what it was, that she'd been there once before.

He put his hand to his windpipe, as if he couldn't get enough air in, and turned his head sickly away. Any shred of hope he may have had until now, that she'd lost the locket and someone living in that house had picked it up and carried it there to lose it a second time in the fire, was swept remorselessly away; no room any more for benefit of doubt.

She started on again, so he did too. Why didn't she turn back, wasn't it bad enough, what she'd done already? Was she going to do it over again, the very night after? But hope springs eternal, and a minute after she'd damned herself irrevocably by standing there staring at her handiwork, he was again trying to find an out for her in his own mind. She had undoubtedly been there the night before — there was no denying that — but could she have come home so calm after she had *purposely* done a thing like that? Nobody could. It must have been accidental. She might have had to light a match to find her way downstairs, thrown it over the bannisters, and gone away without realizing what she'd done. Or someone else had done it, right after she left. She might have been visiting some indigent relative or blacksheep that she didn't want him to know about, given them the locket to turn into cash, and then fibbed about it to him; even the best of women kept certain things like that from their husbands at times. It was that alone that kept him from swiftly overtaking, stopping her. Only why didn't she go home, why in God's name didn't she go home now?

Instead she went two blocks farther, then abruptly, as if on the spur of the moment, she chose a side street to the right, leading down

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toward Second Avenue. Again, he took the opposite side of the street, but hung back a little, since it was much narrower than the north-south artery. It was a neighborhood of decrepit, unprotected tenements, all crammed from basement to roof with helpless sleepers, and his spine turned cold as ice as he darted in and out from doorway to doorway after her. And each mouldy entrance that she herself passed, her head would turn a little and she'd glance in, he couldn't help noticing. Past Second she went, all the way to First, and then without warning she doubled back, began to retrace her steps. He shrank back into the nearest doorway and flattened himself there, to let her go by. At last, he breathed with relief, she was going home. And then the horrid thought occurred — had she just been reconnoitering, trying to pick the right spot for her ghastly act?

There was not even a taxi driver around this time; the street, the whole zone, was dead. She passed a building that was vacant, that had been foreclosed and doomed to demolition perhaps, whose five floors of curtainless windows stared blankly forth, most of the lower panes broken by ball-playing kids. She had passed it once before. Now suddenly, just as she came abreast of it, the blackness of its yawning entry-way seemed to suck her in. One minute she was there in full view on the sidewalk, the next she had vanished; she was gone like a puff of smoke, and he shuddered at the implication.

He came out of his retreat and started crossing diagonally toward where she had gone in. As he neared it he quickened his steps, until he was nearly running. He looked in from the sidewalk; it was like trying to peer through black velvet. He stepped in, treading softly, one hand out before him. Something suddenly slashed across his waist and he nearly folded up like a jacknife. One hand pressed to the excruciating stomach pain that resulted, he explored the obstacle with the other. The front door had evidently been stolen off its hinges, carted away for firewood. In place of it the new owners or the police had nailed up a number of slats to keep out intruders, all but the middle one of these had also been yanked away, and you could either slip in under it or, rather foolishly, climb up over it. He ducked below it, went soft-shoeing down the musty hall, keeping the wall at his shoulder to guide him, stopping every other minute to listen, trying to find out where she had gone.

Suddenly the thin glow of a match showed ahead, far down at the other end of the hall. Not the flame itself — that was hidden — just its dimmer reflection, little more than darkness with motes of orange in it. It was coming from behind the staircase; so too, before he could take even another step forward, was the rattling and scuffling of dry papers, then the ominous sound of a box being dragged across the floor. He plunged forward, still keeping his heels clear of the

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ground. The match glow went out once before he got there, then a second one immediately replaced it. He turned the corner of the staircase base and stopped dead —

He saw it with his own eyes; caught her in the very act, red-handed, killing all condonation, all doubt, once and for all. She had dragged a box filled with old newspapers into the angle formed by the two walls of the little alcove just under and behind the long tinder-dry wooden staircase that went up five stories, with a broken skylight above to give it a perfect flue. He saw the lighted match leave her hand, fall downward into the box, saw a second one flare and follow it with the quickness that only a woman can give such a gesture, saw her preparing to strike a third one on the sandpaper.

He caught her with both hands, one at the wrist, the other just under the thick knot of hair at the back of her neck. She couldn't turn, gave a sort of heave that was half vocal and half bodily, and billowed out like a flag caught in a high wind. He flung her sideways and around to the back of him, let go his hold, and heard her stumble up against the wall. The silence of the two of them only added to the horror of the situation, in a gloom that was already beginning to be relieved by yellow flashes coming up from the box, each time higher than before. He kicked it further out with the back of his heel, to where he could get at it, then tamped his foot down into the very middle of it, again and again, flattening the papers, stifling the vicious yellow brightness. It snuffed out under the beating, pitch-darkness welled up around him, and he heard the pad of her footfalls running down the long hallway, careening crazily from side to side until they vanished outside in the street. He couldn't go after her yet, he had to make sure.

He made the mistake of reaching down for the box with his hand, intending to drag it after him out into the open. The draft of the abrupt motion must have set a dozen wicked little red eyes gleaming again inside it, then an unevenness between two boards of the rotting floor jogged it, caught it, up-ended it behind him before he could check his progress. It was out from under the stairs now, with an open flume straight up through the roof to the sky above sucking at it. Instantly papers and red sparks went swirling upward in a deadily funnel; before his eyes he saw the sparks fanned brighter, bigger, the scorched papers burst into yellow flame once more as they shot up the long dark chute, striking against this bannister and that like so many fireballs setting off the dried woodwork. Before he could reach the nearest of them, on the floor above, the whole crazy spiral from top to bottom was alight with concentric rings of brightness, one to a floor. It was too late — she'd accomplished what she'd set out to do, in spite of him! He turned back from the first landing that he'd climbed up to, raced down again and

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out along the hall, remembering the board at the entrance just in time. A faint crackling already sounded from the shaft behind him, like a lot of mice nibbling at something. He tore out of the tunnel-like doorway, and turned up toward the corner.

He saw her just a few steps ahead of him, she hadn't gone very far after all. She was lingering there about the premises as though she couldn't tear herself away. He caught her by the hand as he swept by, pulled her after him as far as the corner, where the alarm box was. She didn't resist, didn't try to escape from him at all, not even when he let go of her to send in the call. Then he hurried onward with her, not waiting for the apparatus to get there. If he'd been alone it would have been different, but he was afraid she'd say something, give herself away, if they questioned her. He didn't want her arrested — not until he had a chance to find out what was the matter with her first. They were three blocks away already, hurrying homeward, when the engines went roaring and clanging past them up Third Avenue, satanic red lights aglow. He bowed his head, but she turned and stared after them.

The only time he spoke, the whole way, was once when he asked her in a muffled voice: "How many times did you do it — before tonight?" She didn't answer. When the porter in their own building had taken them up to their floor and said "Good night," she was the one who replied, just as though nothing had happened. Jordan closed the door and locked it on the two of them — and what they both knew, and nobody else. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand, then turned and leaned it against the wall.

"People might have been living in that house," he said heavily.

"But there weren't any, it was vacant," she said simply.

"There were plenty in the houses on either side of it. It doesn't matter even if it was just a pile of brushwood in a vacant lot." He took her by the shoulders and made her look at him. "Don't you feel well? Does your head bother you? What makes you do it?"

She shrank back, suddenly terrified. "No, no, not that! I know what you mean. Oh, Harry, don't take my mind from me, you can't! There's nothing the matter with me! They told you that long ago, they proved it, all of them, after my accident!" She would have gone down on her knees, but he held her up.

"Then why do you do it? Why? Why?" he kept asking.

"I don't know. I can't help it." That was all they said that night.

He was still in the same clothes, hadn't been to bed at all, when the morning paper was left at the door. He lifted himself stiffly off the chair that he had tilted on its two hind legs against the door, to make sure that she stayed in the place, took the paper inside and looked for the account. It wasn't played up much,

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they'd put it out after it had destroyed the staircase, and they were inclined to think that two tramps who had found shelter on one of the upper floors had inadvertently started it, either by smoking or cooking their food. One had run away but one had been found with a broken leg in the rear yard where he'd leaped down trying to save himself, and was in the hospital. Jordan got an envelope and jotted down the fellow's name and the hospital on the outside of it, then stuck two five dollar bills in it with a note, just two words: "Sorry, buddy."

Then he got the police on the wire: "Are there going to be charges against this vag So-and-so with the broken leg, in connection with that fire last night?" There certainly were, he was assured: vagrancy, unlawful entry, and setting fire to the premises, and who wanted to know anyway? "I'm an investigator for the Herk Insurance Company. He'll have to take the rap on the first two counts maybe, but I'd like to say a word for him on the fire charge. Let me know at my office when the case comes up." Time enough to figure out a way of clearing the man without involving her, when the time came.

Then he telephoned his boss. "Cancel that report I turned in on the fire night before last, the Lapolla property, and hold up the indemnity." He swallowed hard. "It wasn't accidental — it was arson."

Parmenter got excited right away. "Who was responsible, got any idea?"

"An unknown woman," said Jordan limply. "That's all I can tell you right now. Lapolla himself had no connection with it, take my word for it. I'll give you a new report when I get a little more evidence — and, and, I won't be in until late today."

He went to the bedroom door, took the key out of his pocket, and unlocked it. The room was dark, he'd nailed down the Venetian blinds to the window-sills the night before. Looking at her lying there so calm, so innocent, he wondered if she was insane, or what. Yet the specialists who had examined her when he and she had brought suit against the taxi company whose cab she had fallen out of, hadn't been able to find anything, not even a fracture or concussion; she was right about that. They had lost the suit as a result. But maybe things like that came on slowly, or maybe there was no connection, it was something deeper, more inexplicable. He woke her up pretty gently, and said, "Better go in and get the kid ready for school. Don't say anything about last night in front of him, understand?"

When the boy had left he said, "Let's go out and get some air, I don't have to go to work today, Parmenter's laid up." She got her hat and coat without a word. They set out without seeming to have any fixed destination, but Jordan led toward Fifth Avenue and there he flagged a bus. He pulled the cord at 168th, and she followed him out in silence. But when he stopped a little

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further on, she looked up at the building. "Why, this is the Psychiatric Institute!" she said, and got white.

"Parmenter's in there undergoing treatment, they told me about it when I telephoned the office," he said. "You come in and wait, I want to go up and see how he's getting along."

She went in with him without further protest. He left her sitting there out in the reception room, and asked to see one of the staff members. He closed his eyes, could hardly answer when he was asked what they could do for him. "I'd like to have my wife put under observation." He had rehearsed what he was going to say on the way there; he still couldn't bear to tell them the whole truth — not yet anyway. She would be liable to imprisonment if sane, commitment to one of the hideous State Institutions if unbalanced, he couldn't let that happen to her. There were always private sanitariums, nursing homes, he could put her in himself — but he had to find out first. What symptoms, if any, did she show, he was asked.

"Nothing very alarming," he said, "she — she goes for short walks by herself in the middle of the night, that's all, claims she can't sleep." The fire must stay out of this at all costs; reluctantly he brought out a small bottle of chocolate-colored liquid that he had collected from their pan of the radiator before leaving the flat. "I have reason to believe she tried to give me a sleeping potion, so that I wouldn't worry about her going out. You can tell if you'll analyze this. We have a child; I think for his sake you should set my mind at rest."

He could, they told him, engage a private room for her if he wanted to and leave her there for the night, have one of the staff doctors look at her when he came in. It would have to be voluntary, though, they couldn't commit her against her will merely at his request and without a physician's certificate.

He nodded. "I'll go out and talk it over with her." He went back and sat down beside her. "Marie, would you trust me enough to stay here overnight so they can tell us whether there's anything the matter with you?"

She got frightened at first. "Then it wasn't your boss! I knew that, I knew you were going to do this from the time we left the house!" She lowered her voice to a whisper, so they wouldn't be overheard. "Harry, I'm sane! You know it! Don't do this to me, you can't!"

"It's either that, or I'll have to go to the police about you. Which is it going to be?" he asked her, also in a whisper. "I've got to, I'm an accessory if I don't. You'll end up by killing somebody, if you haven't already without my knowing it. It's for your own sake, Marie."

"I'll never do it again — I swear I won't!" she pleaded, so convincingly, with such childlike earnestness, that he saw where the real risk lay.

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It was like water off a duck's back; she didn't seem to realize even now the heinousness of having done it at all, and certainly she would keep on doing it again and again, every time she got the chance.

"But you said yourself you didn't know why you did it, you couldn't help it."

"Well, keep matches away from me, then; don't let me see any, don't smoke in front of me."

"Now, I haven't said a word to them about the fire — we'll keep that to ourselves, until we find out one way or the other. But don't lie to them Marie. They're only trying to help you. If they ask you, tell them openly about this craving of yours, this fascination matches have for you, without letting them know you've already given in to it." He stroked her hand reassuringly. "How about it?"

She was much calmer now, she was over her first fright. "Do you swear they won't try to hold me here against my will, use force — a straitjacket or something?"

"I'm your husband, I wouldn't let anything like that happen to you," he said. "You stay here just for tonight, of your own free will, and I'll come back tomorrow for you, without fail, and we'll hear what they have to say."

"I don't like to leave the kid like that. Who'll look after him, Harry? Who'll get his meals?"

"I'll send him over to Mrs. Klein, let him eat supper there and stay overnight — the mother of that little fellow he plays with."

"All right," she agreed. "I'll do it — but you'll see, they'll tell you there's nothing the matter with me. Wait'll you hear what they say." And as they stood up, she smiled confidently, as if already sure what the outcome would be. He made the necessary arrangements with the reception clerk, and as the nurse led her away she was still smiling. He didn't like that.

He went to the office but he couldn't keep his mind on what he was doing, tried three times to make out a new report on the Lapolla fire and tore up each attempt. How could he keep faith with his firm, present evidence that it was arson, and not involve her? There must be a way, but it would have to wait until he was calmer, could think more clearly. He went back to the flat at three, to meet the kid when he came back from school.

"Your mother's on a visit," he told him. "You ask Mrs. Klein if it's all right for you to stay overnight at their house." The kid was tickled, and went sailing out. Then in about ten minutes he came back again; the Kleins lived on the next block. "Darn it, Sammy's getting a new brother and they can't have any company in their house!"

Jordan knew he could have taken him out to a cafeteria with him, if the meal was all that mattered, but the kid was so disappointed he felt sorry for him. "Got any other pals

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you could stay with?" he asked him.

"Sure, I could go to Frankie's house, he's a swell guy!"

"All right, but you give me the address first, I'll stop up there later on tonight, and if I don't like the looks of the place I'm bringing you home with me again." Vizetelly was the name; he jotted down the number of the house, it was in their own immediate neighborhood but a little farther to the east. It was a jim-dandy place, the kid assured him, he'd been there lots of times before. Jordan just smiled and let him go. Then he gave a sigh and went back to the office again.

He stayed on at his desk long after everyone else had gone, moiling over the Lapolla report under a shaded light when it got too dark to see any more. The best he could do with it was to doctor up the statement of the taxi driver who had turned in the alarm, making it appear he had seen an unknown woman run out of the doorway fifteen or twenty minutes before the fire had been discovered. The Herk Company wouldn't cross-question the driver over and above his say-so, he felt pretty sure; the trouble was, if it ever got to the ears of the Fire Marshal's office — ouch! It was the first time he'd ever put down a deliberate falsehood in one of his reports, he thought wryly; but to let it go down on the record as being accidental, knowing what he did, would have been an even greater misstatement. That Washington Heights affair of the week before ought to be reopened too, he realized, but an indemnity payment had already been made, and it would be a mess to tackle it now. He clasped his head dejectedly between his hands. Finally he shoved the report out of sight in the drawer, got up and looked at the clock. It was after nine, he'd stayed hours overtime. He snapped out the light, felt his way out, and locked up the silent office after him.

He went into a beanery and bought some food, just out of pure habit, then found he couldn't touch it after all. He sat there smoking one cigarette after the other, wondering what the verdict was going to be. They must have examined her by this time. They wouldn't wait to do it at one or two in the morning. Maybe he could find out if he called. Maybe they'd let him talk to her. He could cheer her up, find out how she was taking it. Why not? She wasn't bedridden, there was nothing the matter with her physically. Finally he couldn't stand it any more, had to know, took a deep breath and stood up. Ten-twenty-five, the clock said. He shut himself in a booth and called the Psychiatric.

"Would it be at all possible for me to say a word to Mrs. Marie Jordan?" he asked timidly. "She was entered for observation at noon, room 210. This is her husband."

"This is not a hotel, Mr. Jordan," was the tart rejoinder. "It's absolutely against the regulations."

"Not allowed to call her to the phone, eh?" he asked forlornly.

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"Not only that," the voice answered briskly, "the patient was discharged half an hour ago at her own request, as of perfectly sound mind and body."

Jordan straightened up. "Oh, Lord!" he groaned. "Do you people know what you've done?"

"We usually do," she snapped. "Just a second, I'll look up the report the examiner left with us, for your information." He was sweating freely as he waited for her to come back. Then she began to read: "Marie Jordan, age thirty-eight, weight one-hundred forty, eyes blue, hair — is that your wife?"

"Yes, yes! What has he got to say?"

" 'Perfectly normal,' " she quoted. " 'Strongly developed maternal instinct, metabolism sound, no nervous disorders whatever. In short, no necessity for undergoing treatment of any kind.' I would like to call your attention, Mr. Jordan, to a short postscript in Dr. Grenell's own handwriting. Dr. Grenell, you may not know, is one of our biggest authorities in this field. He usually knows what he's saying and he seems to feel rather strongly about your wife's case." She cleared her throat meaningly. " 'This seems to my mind a glaring instance of willful persecution on the part of the patient's husband. The shoe seems to fit on the other foot, judging by his habit of following her furtively along the street, so that she was finally compelled to go out only when she thought him asleep, as well as the fact that he imprisoned her in a locked room, mounting guard outside her door, and had hallucinations that the food she prepared for him was drugged. A chemical analysis of the specimen submitted to us proved the charge unfounded. Subjection to treatment of this sort over a period of months or years will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on this woman's mind and bodily health, but so far there are no signs of it. I have told her she is entitled to police protection if it recurs. Case discharged. Grenell, M.D.' "

"Tell Dr. Grenell I congratulate him," groaned Jordan. "He's turned a pyromaniac loose on the sleeping city!" And he hung up and just stood there weaving back and forth on his heels for a minute in the narrow confines of the booth.

Maybe she was sane, maybe they were right — but then she was a criminal, in the worst sense of the word, without even the usual criminal's excuse for her actions — hope of gain! He kept shaking his head. No, he was right and they were wrong, in spite of all their experts and all their findings. She'd been lucky and she'd fooled them, that was all. Her actions alone convinced him that bedtime drink had had something in it, but the sediment must have gone to the bottom of the radiator-pan and in scooping it up he hadn't got any of it. He didn't blame them in a way, he'd deliberately withheld the key to the whole thing from them, thinking only to spare

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her; as a result it had boomeranged. Sure he'd locked her in her bedroom and sure he'd followed her along the street — what they didn't know was he'd caught her dropping burning matches into a box of kindling under the staircase of a vacant tenement at one in the morning! Well, the hell with them, they hadn't helped him any! It was in his own hands again, as it had been at the start.

"Strongly developed maternal instinct!" Sure she had it, why not. She was perfect in every way, A-1, except for this one horrible quirk that had cropped up! "Strongly developed —" The kid! His extremities got cold all at once. She'd been discharged half an hour ago, she'd look him up the first thing, he'd told her where he was going to take him! He didn't trust her in anything now. He was going up there and get the kid quick, before she did! He didn't think she'd really harm him, but she might take him away with her, not show up at home any more, disappear, afraid of him now or sore at what he'd done to her. Not while he knew it! He wasn't going to let that kid out of his sight from now on, sleep right in the same room with him even if she did come back to the flat! A woman that didn't have more moral sense than to cremate people alive, slip a sedative to her own husband — no telling what she'd end up by doing!

He nearly shattered the glass by the speed with which he got out of the phone booth. He tossed money at the cashier without waiting for change, jumped into a cab in front of the place, gave the fellow the Kleins's address. "Hurry it up will you — every minute counts!"

But they'd started from way downtown, very near his office. Quarter-to-eleven had run up to nearly forty after, even with the driver using a stagger system on the lights, before they got up into the East Side Eighties. He jumped out in front of the Kleins's place, paid the cab, and ran in. He rang the bell of their flat like fury. Klein came to the door himself, there was subdued excitement in the place, all the lights lit. "Sh!" he warned proudly, "my wife's presenting me with an addition to the family." He whipped a long black cigar out of his vest-pocket, poked it at Jordan with a grin. Jordan fell back a step in sudden recollection.

"Oh, I remember now! He told me that this afternoon, he didn't come here after all, went someplace else — my kid —" He fumbled in his clothes for the slip of paper he'd written the name and address on.

"Yeah, your wife was here asking for him a little while ago. She thought he was up here too," Klein said. "I didn't know anything about it, but I heard Sammy, that's my youngster, telling her he'd gone to some other boy's house —" He broke off short in surprise, watched the other man go tumbling down the stairs again, holding a scrap of paper in one hand; looked down at his feet and saw the cellophaned cigar he'd just presented him with lying there. He bent down

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and picked it up shaking his head. "No fatherly feeling at all," he muttered.

Jordan was hanging onto the paper for dear life, as though that would get him over there quicker. Vizetelly, that was the name, why hadn't he remembered sooner! She must have beaten him to it by this time, been there and already taken the kid away. If she went home with him from there, all right, but if she took it into her poor warped mind to beat it off with him, hide herself away someplace, how was he ever — ?

The sickening keen of a fire siren, off someplace in the distance, stopped him for a minute like a bullet, turned his spine to ice; he went right on again with a lurch. Too far away to mean anything, but Lord what a thought that had been just now! But it didn't fade out, instead it rose and rose and rose, and suddenly it burst into a full-throated scream as the trucks went tearing across the lower end of the side street he was following, first one and then a second and then a third; and when he turned the corner he saw people running, just like he was running himself only not so fast and not so scared, toward another side street two blocks up. And that was the one the paper in his hand told him to go to.

He shot across the thronged avenue with the immunity of a drunk or a blind man, and felt some squealing car sweep his hat off his head, and didn't even blink or turn to look. Oh, no! he was praying, there are twenty other houses on that block, it can't be just that very one, 322, that's laying it on too thick, that's rubbing it in too strong — give a guy a break once in awhile! He turned the corner, and he saw the ladders going up, the hoses already playing on the roof, the smoke quilting the sky, black on top, red underneath, and it was on the near side, the even numbered side. He had to slow up, he was knocking people over every minute as the crowd tightened around him. 316 — gee, he'd better get him out in a hurry, those people must live in the house right next door! 318 — a cop tried to motion him back and he ducked under his arm. Then he came up flat against a solid wall of humanity dammed up by the ropes they'd already stretched out, and a yell of agony wrenched from him as his eyes went on ahead unimpeded. One more doorway, 320, with people banked up in it, kept back by a fireman, and then the one beyond, just a hazy sketch through the smoke-pall, blurred oilskinned figures moving in and out, highlighted with orange by some hidden glare inside. Glass tinkling and the crowd around him stampeding back and axes hacking woodwork and thin screams from way up, as in an airplane, and a woman coming down a ladder with a bird-cage.

He quit struggling and grappling with them after awhile because he found out it used up too much strength, and he only lost ground,

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they shoved him further back each time. He just pleaded with them after that, and asked them over and over, and never got any answer. Then finally, it seemed like hours had gone by, they had everyone out — and no sign of his kid anywhere. He didn't even know what the people looked like, he ran amuck among the huddled survivors yelling "Vizetelly! Vizetelly!" He found the man in as bad a shape as he was himself, gibbering in terror, "I don't know! I can't find my own! I was in the tavern on the corner when they came and told me!"

This time they had to fling him back from within the black hallway of the building itself, coughing and kicking like a maniac, and the cop they turned him over to outside had to pin him down flat on his back on the sidewalk before he'd quit struggling. "He's up there, I tell you! Why don't they get him out! I'm going to get him myself!"

"Quiet, now, quiet, or I'll have to give you the club! They've gone up again to look."

The cop had let him up again but was holding onto him, the two of them pressed flat against the wall of the adjoining building as close as they dared go, when he saw the two firemen coming down the ladder again. One of them crumpled as he touched the ground and had to be carried away. And he heard what the other one yelled hoarsely to his commanding officer: "Yeah, there is something up there in the back room of that top floor flat, can't tell if it's a kid or just a burnt log, couldn't get near enough. I'm going up again, had to get Marty down first." A boom like dynamite came from inside, as if in answer.

"There goes the roof!" said somebody. A tornado of smoke, cinders and embers blew from the door like an explosion, swirling around them where they stood. In that instant of cringing confusion Jordan slipped the cop's revolver out of its holster with his free hand, hid it under his own coat. The man, wheezing, eyes smarting, already dishevelled from their previous struggle, never missed it.

It was only later, tottering down the street alone, that he began to fully understand why he'd done it. She'd done this, like the others, and he'd known it from the beginning, that was why he had the gun on him now. Some day, sooner or later, he'd find her again. He'd never rest from now on until he had and when he did! He didn't have to overhear what that woman tenant had been gabbling hysterically to one of the assistant marshals, to know. "I tell you I saw a woman that didn't belong in the house running out of the door only ten minutes or so before it started! I happened to be by the window, watching for my husband to come home! She was all untidy-looking and she kept looking back all the way to the corner, like she'd done something she shouldn't!" He didn't have to see the man Vizetelly straining a kid to him and rolling gratefu

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eyes upward, to know what that "burnt log" in the top-floor-rear stood for now. The only life lost, the only person missing, still unaccounted for, out of all that houseful of people — his kid and hers! It couldn't have worked out more damnably if she'd plotted it that way on purpose. And maybe she had at that, demented fire-worshipper that she was! "Strongly developed maternal instinct," and fire was happiness to her, and she'd wanted her kid happy too. He sucked in his breath as he stumbled along.

They'd wanted to ship him off in an ambulance at first, to be treated for shock, but he'd talked them out of it. He had the cure right with him now under his coat, the best cure. He was going home first, wait awhile, see if she'd show up not knowing that he already knew, and if she didn't, then he was going out after her.

The porter took him up when he sagged in, and stared at the strange whiteness of him, the hand clutched to his side under his coat as if he had a pain, but didn't say anything. When the operator had gone down again he got his key out and put it to the door and went in.

He was too dazed for a minute to notice that he didn't have to put the lights on, and by that time he'd already seen her, crouched away from him in the farthest corner of the living room, terror and guilt written all over her face. There was the answer right there, no need to ask. But he did anyway. He shut the living room door after him and said in a lifeless voice: "Did you do that to 322 tonight?"

Death must have been written on his face; she was too abjectly frightened to deny it. "I only went there — I — I — oh, Harry, I couldn't help it! I didn't want to, but I couldn't help it — my hands did it by themselves. Take me back to the hospital —"

"You'd only beat that rap again, like you did before." He was choking. "You know what you've taken from us, don't you?" She began to shake her head, faster and faster, like a pendulum. "Come closer to me, Marie. Don't look down, keep looking at my face —"

It went off with a roar that seemed to lift them both simultaneously, so close together had they come, almost touching. She didn't fall; there was a mantel behind her, she staggered backward, caught it with both upturned hands, and seemed to hang there, gripping life with ten fingers. Her eyes glazed. "You shouldn't have — done that," she whispered. "You'll wake up the kid."

The door came open behind him; he turned and saw the kid standing there, staring from one to the other. She was still upright, lower now, one hand slipped from the mantel edge. "Almighty God," he said. He stood staring at the boy. Then he said, "You go out to the telephone and say you want a policeman. You're a big guy, son, you know how to use it. Close the door. Don't stand there looking in at us."

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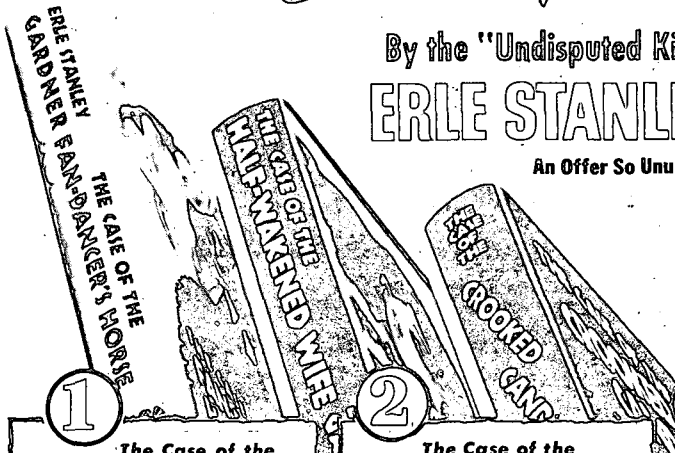

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The Case of the FAN-DANCER'S HORSE

WHEN Mason finds a fan-dancer's costume—he advertises for the owner. But when gorgeous Cheri Chi-Chi turns up to claim it, she declares she has lost a *wounded saddle horse!* Then Perry's client steals his car—and is found burying a *blood-spattered fan.* "Murder" say the police—and hint Perry is an accomplice!

The Case of the HALF-WAKENED WIFE

IT'S night. You're aboard a yacht. Suddenly . . . a shot! Then . . . "Man Overbo-o-oard!" And you find yourself clutching a woman holding a gun—*from which one shot has been fired!*

The lady is accused of *murder.* Mason, her lawyer, is the ONLY one who believes her innocent. So what does she do? She FIRES him!

The Case of the CROOKED CANDLE

A FIGURE lies on a blood-stained carpet aboard a boat aground in the bay. The tide goes out. The boat keels over. The body rolls over and over, until it slams against the wall!

The "corpse" jumps up—*with a big grin!* It's Mason—and he has just solved a case that rests on the curious clue of a candle!

Continued on inside cover

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